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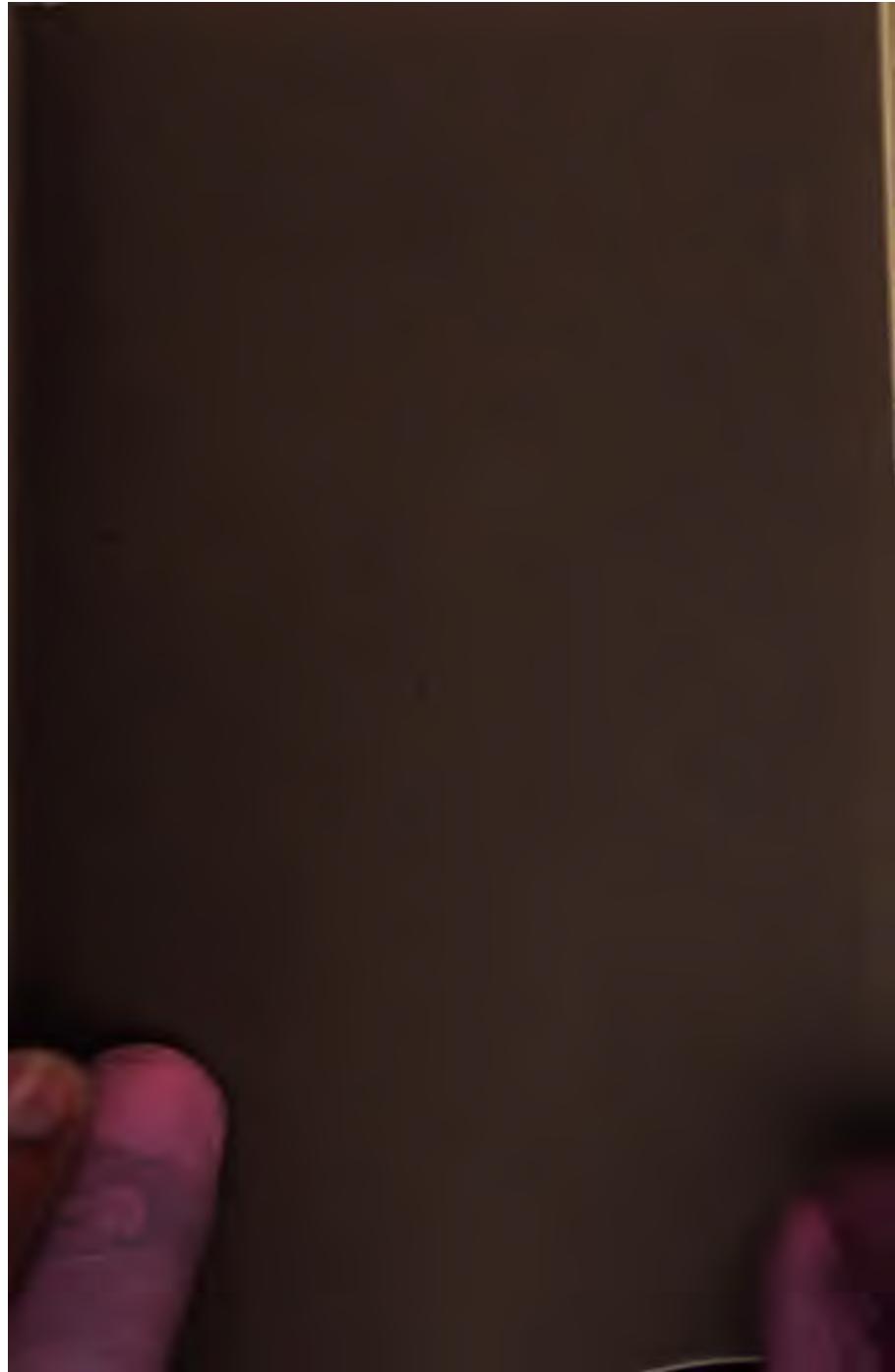
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THE THREE OXONIANS.

VOL. II.

THE THREE OXONIANS.

BY



FRANK USHER.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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THE THREE OXONIANS.

CHAPTER I.

A CONFESSTION OF LOVE.

MICHAELMAS Term was over, and the undergraduates of St. Kenelm's College were preparing to disperse to their several homes for the Christmas vacation. The schools were over, too, and, to the great joy of the Kenelmites, our friend Haller had succeeded in getting through Moderations, or, as he put it, in scoring over the examiners. Haller was in high glee at the thought of his triumph, principally because the Reverend Mr. Frumble had predicted his failure, and threatened to advise the expulsion of so negligent a pupil from the College of St. Kenelm's, should Haller have failed to pass his examination. It had been a successful term

for the athletic members of the College, for the St. Kenelm's boat-club had had two men in the Trial Eights, and one of them, Longley, was spoken of as being certain of a place in the 'Varsity Eight. The aquatic prospects of the College were very bright for the ensuing year, and Colner had been heard to declare, with much confidence, that the betting upon St. Kenelm's going to the head of the river, next Summer, was the *Great Eastern* steamer to a cockle-shell.

Our three friends were wishing each other good-bye at the railway station, for their journeys lay in different directions. Haller and Longley were going down to Leamington, where the former proposed to abide with the latter for a week ; Colner was going to London, for the purpose of paying the visit to which he had looked forward with such eagerness. The London train was in the station, and he had secured his seat in it, and his two friends were hanging on to the window of the carriage, giving him their final injunctions before the train moved off.

"Write to us to-night, Tommy," said Haller,

"and let us know how you get on with the old lady."

"Be very careful, old man," advised Longley. "Do not commit yourself more than is absolutely necessary."

"Come down to us, Tommy, when you leave London. Longley will put you up. It will be all on your way home; at least, it won't make a difference of more than fifty miles."

"I'll answer for my aunt's finding you a room and being glad to see you," said Longley.

"I thank you both," replied Colner; "but I think that I must go to Stickborough first."

"No, don't do that, Tommy; you'll have plenty of time for doing the filial afterwards."

"Any more going on?" shouted the guard.

"Good-bye, Tommy. Our train is in. Do come to us if you can."

"All right; if I can I will. Good-bye, Punch; good-bye, Longley, old fellow. Take care of yourselves, and enjoy yourselves very much,"

The train moved off, and Colner, who did not know any of the other occupants of the carriage, betook himself to the perusal of a newspaper.

How slowly to our lover did that express

train seem to crawl along ! How he chafed and fumed whenever its speed slackened, or it stopped at a station ! Never, he thought, had there been such a slow train. And yet, according to his watch, which he had set by the station clock at Oxford, it was wonderfully punctual for a Great Western train. Surely his watch must have stopped. No, it was ticking away as merrily as ever. He resumed the perusal of the journal. No, he could not read. With an exclamation of disgust, he gave up the attempt, and, leaning back in his seat, devoted himself to thoughts of the virtues of his beloved.

At last London was reached, and Colner jumped out of the train and into a cab, the driver of which he bade drive as fast as he could to Mrs. Martin's house. He had no luggage but a portmanteau, which he abandoned to its fate, in the hope of finding it, when required, at the office for lost luggage.

Mrs. Martin's house was but five minutes' walk from the station, consequently Colner soon found himself in the street in which she lived. Two ladies were walking down the street, and Colner's heart gave a great jump as

he caught sight of them. That figure! that hair! Surely it must be! The cab rattled past them, and Colner's hope was realised. It was, indeed, the object of his affections. He threw open the little trap-door in the roof of the cab, and calling out to the driver to stop, leapt from the vehicle before the cabman had time to obey the command.

"My dear Miss Williams!" he cried, rushing up to her, "I knew that it must be you! I am so glad to see you!"

Lottie's face wore the most charming of blushes, as she put out her little hand to greet him. Her heart was beating fast, and a thousand emotions were surging in a tumultuous whirl in her bosom at the sight of Colner.

"And you are going to Mrs. Martin's, I suppose?" said Colner, as Lottie remained silent. "How strange that we should meet!"

Polly, whose eyes were sparkling with fun, managed, unperceived by Colner, to give her sister a dig in the ribs, and this restored Lottie to comparative self-possession.

"Yes, we are going to pay her a visit," she answered. "This is my sister. May I introduce you to her?"

Colner raised his hat in acquiescence, and Polly returned his salutation with an elaborate bow.

"I am going to see Mrs. Martin too," said Colner. "Really this is a most unexpected pleasure for me, Miss Williams. I had no hope of seeing you to-day."

Lottie expressed her gratification at the *rencontre* in becoming terms ; and then an awkward silence ensued, and Colner walked along by the side of his beloved, torturing himself to think of something to say to her. At last the weather suggested itself to him, and he observed that it was a very fine day ; to which remark Lottie assented. Then came another awful silence, which lasted until they arrived at Mrs. Martin's house. Colner knocked at the door, and, learning that Mrs. Martin was at home, the three entered the house, and were duly ushered into the drawing-room, where they found the old lady reclining upon a sofa, reading the first column of the *Times*.

"Ah ! my dear child !" she cried, upon seeing Lottie. "What a pleasure to see you ! Mr. Colner, too," added she, as she perceived that

the girls were accompanied by that gentleman. "Have you been in town long, Mr. Colner?" she asked, casting a penetrating glance at him.

"For not more than ten minutes," he answered. "I had the pleasure of meeting Miss Williams in this street, and so we arrived here together."

"Well, I am glad to see you all. It is a curious thing that you should meet. I had no idea that you would come to-day, my dear," said she to Lottie, at the same time giving Colner a look which, being interpreted, meant, "This meeting is no arrangement of mine."

"It was such a fine morning that Polly and I thought that a walk would do us good," said Lottie.

"Well, my dears, I am charmed to see you!" exclaimed Mrs. Martin, kissing the two girls. "How well you look!"

"I can return the compliment, I am happy to say," replied Lottie.

"Yes, my dear, I am much better than I was, thank God. Will you spend the day with me?"

"We cannot, dear Mrs. Martin," answered Lottie. "We have to be home by four o'clock, for dinner."

"Well, my dears, run and take your hats off;" and, in obedience to this request, the two girls left the room.

"You have said nothing to Lottie, I suppose, Mr. Colner?" asked the old lady, when the girls had departed.

"Nothing," replied he; "I have had no chance of doing so."

"And you are still bent upon telling her of your love?"

"More firmly than ever," answered Colner, in a voice which betokened an unalterable determination.

"Have you mentioned the subject to your parents?"

"Not yet; but I shall, if I succeed in gaining Lottie's consent."

"Have you considered all that I told you about her father?"

"I have, and have come to the conclusion that it does not affect Lottie in the slightest degree."

“ You are a rash boy ; but I admire you for loving that sweet girl as you do ; still, really I think that you ought to have consulted some friend before speaking to her.”

“ I have consulted two friends, and they approve of my conduct,” replied Colner to her objection.

“ I am very glad of that,” said the old lady, with an air of gratification. “ It is a serious thing that you are meditating, Mr. Colner. It may mar your happiness for life.”

“ It will secure my happiness for life, you mean, my dear Mrs. Martin !” answered Colner, enthusiastically.

“ Well, well, I trust that it may. I love Lottie as if she were my own daughter, and her happiness is very dear to me.”

“ I hope that you have confidence in the truth of my love for her ?” said Colner.

“ Yes; I believe that you are too noble-minded ever to give her cause of unhappiness. My fears are not that you will ever cease to love her ; I have explained to you the grounds of my uneasiness.”

“ Pray have no fear on that score, my dear

Mrs. Martin; matters are certain to come right."

"I hope so, most fervently," said Mrs. Martin, earnestly. "Will you tell me what course of action you intend to adopt?"

"Do you mean as to confessing to Lottie?"

"Yes. I suppose that you wish to make your confession as soon as possible!"

"Oh! of course; but, upon my word, I have not thought of how I am to do it. I shall tell her that I love her, and shall ask her if she thinks that she can ever love me. Will that do?"

"Yes, I think that that will do," replied Mrs. Martin, smiling. "I shall go and send Lottie to you."

"One moment," cried Colner, detaining her, as she was about to leave the room. "You do think that Lottie cares a little for me, do you not?"

"You must ask her the question. How can I know the secrets of her heart?"

"But you said once, if you remember, that you thought she did love—I mean, that she did like me."

"Oh! yes, I am sure that she does not dislike you."

"Ah! yes, thank you," stammered Colner, looking very hot and flurried; "but I mean—that is, I wish, or, rather, I should like to know for certain, if I could, you know."

"Well, Mr. Colner," answered the old lady, amused at the perturbation of our friend, "you only have to ask her."

"Yes, true; but I think—that is, do you not think that it would be well for you to ask Lottie?"

"Do you wish me to propose to her for you? I hardly think that that is the best plan."

"Oh! no," protested Colner; "I didn't mean that. I only thought that if you could just give her a hint, you know, that it might be as well."

"No; I shall leave you to make your own confession. You can do it so much better than I could!" and with these words Mrs. Martin quitted the room.

For some minutes Colner sat striving to compose himself for the interview for which he had so long prayed; but no effort of his could still

the beating of the heart that threatened to burst—no words would frame themselves for his utterance.

There was the rustling of a dress outside the door; a hand was placed upon the handle of the door; there was a momentary pause—surely she will not refuse to enter?

The door opened, and she stood once more before him. Colner rose and advanced to meet her, but all objects seemed to swim in the film that had risen before his eyes, and in his throat there seemed to be a big lump which stifled his voice.

Lottie looked at him with some alarm, for she feared that he was unwell. No suspicion of the secret which Colner was longing to confess to her, crossed her pure young mind. She, poor girl, had schooled herself into the belief that to him she was an object of friendly feeling, perhaps, but nothing more.

“Mrs. Martin will come soon,” she said. “She is shewing some dresses to my sister. You seem to be unwell, Mr. Colner. Can we do anything for you?”

“Oh! no, I’m not well—I mean, I am very

well," articulated Colner. "I had a headache; it is better. Yes, I assure you that it is better—quite well, in fact."

" You have been working too hard, I fear," said Lottie. " Have you had any examination to go through?"

" Oh! no, Miss Williams, no examination. I have not been working very hard—not at books, at least."

" You have been rowing very much, have you not?"

" A little. I have had to look after our Torpid, and teach the young ideas how to row," replied Colner, endeavouring to smile and look at his ease.

" Your Torpid? What is that?"

" Our second Eight—so called, I believe, from the slowness of its motion. Good name, is it not?"

" Do you row in it?" asked Lottie.

" Oh! no," replied Colner, forcing a laugh; " I am an old hand. Only the Freshmen and others who have not rowed in the first Eight, row in it."

" Rowing must be very delightful!" observed Lottie, after a short silence.

"Oh! yes; but not all rowing," answered Colner. "I have to coach fellows, you know, and that is not altogether delightful. I dare-say that, out of the thousand or more times that I have been down the river, I have not been half a dozen times for my own amusement."

"I had no idea that rowing was an affair of such labour," said Lottie.

"It is very laborious if you go in for it thoroughly," replied Colner. "The training is the hardest part of it; one has to give up all his little luxuries, and confine himself to a *regime*." Here our lover discovered that he was wandering away from the subject nearest his heart, so he stopped short in his account of the hardships of training, and sat silent, racking his brains to discover a means of leading up to his confession. He had almost made up his mind to blurt out his declaration without preface, when Lottie broke the silence, which was growing irksome.

"What pleasant rows we used to have at Seaford, when you took us upon the sea!"

"Ah! yes, they were very pleasant!—they

were most delightful! I never enjoyed anything so much! And you have not forgotten them, Miss Williams?"

"Oh! no," replied Lottie, with a tone of sadness in her voice. "It was a very happy time that I passed at Seaford."

"So it was for me, Miss Williams. It was the happiest time of my life; in fact, I never was so happy before."

Another long silence ensued, which Lottie dared not break, for she felt that she was on dangerous ground. Colner nerved himself for his final plunge, and with heart beating more quickly, approached the point of revelation.

"Do you know, Miss Williams, what made me so happy at Seaford?" he asked, blushing crimson.

"No," answered Lottie, in tone scarcely audible, and with face nearly as red as Colner's.

"It was because you were there," he continued.

The plunge was taken, but the shock deprived Colner of his voice. Lottie sat silent, the colour flushing and deserting her cheek; her eyes were downcast, and she could not observe

the agitation of him who addressed her. Gradually Colner recovered from the effects of his plunge, and drawing his chair nearer to Lottie, he proceeded to unbosom himself.

"I was so happy at Seaford, Miss Williams. It was because I knew you; because I saw what an angel of goodness you were; because—because I loved you. Lottie, you do not mind me calling you Lottie, do you? I learnt to love you, and I do love you with as deep and passionate a love as ever man felt. I have been half mad with grief at not being able to see you before this, and tell you how dear you are to me. I have longed to meet you again, and to tell you that you are dearer to me than my very life—to ask you if it is possible that you can ever bestow your affections upon one so unworthy of them as I am. May I hope? Do speak, and tell me that I may."

Lottie had averted her face from Colner, who poured forth his confession in quick but faltering tones. She turned towards him, her cheek as pale as the handkerchief that she held in her hand, her bosom heaving violently with the throb of her emotions. Colner awaited her reply in breathless anxiety.

"Oh! Mr. Colner," she murmured faintly; "indeed I never expected this. I never thought—" here she paused, unable to finish her sentence.

"Say that I may hope—that you do care for me just a little," continued Colner, passionately. "I know that I am not worthy of you—nobody could be worthy of you; but heaven knows how deeply I have loved you, how I have no hope of happiness away from you. Do say that I may continue to love you. Do give me some hope."

Lottie struggled bravely to conquer the emotions that were wrestling together in her heart, and in a voice rather more composed she answered,

"You wrong yourself, Mr. Colner; indeed you are far worthier of love and admiration than I am."

Colner protested vehemently that, in comparison with Lottie, he was of little more account than the dust under her feet. Lottie continued,

"Our stations in life are so different. You are rich and respected by everyone who knows you; I am—"

“Do not say such a thing,” interrupted Colner eagerly. “I am not one who believes that the worth of people depends upon accidents of fortune. I consider you far too good for me.”

“No,” answered Lottie, shaking her head sadly; “I am not worthy of you, Mr. Colner.”

“Do not think that,” cried Colner, “rather think that you are immeasurably superior to me in every way. Mrs. Martin has told me your family history. The knowledge of it only makes me loves you the more.”

A blush dyed Lottie’s cheek at the thought that Colner knew the profession of her father. The poor girl bit her lips to restrain the tears that were rising to her eyes, and in the firmest tone that she could command, said,

“No, Mr. Colner; indeed it must not be.”

“And why?” asked Colner, passionately. “Because fortune has not placed our families on a par? Oh, do not think of such a thing. Were you the daughter of a crossing-sweeper—pardon me for saying such a thing—I should love you as madly as I do now—I should deem you far

worthier than myself. Oh, do not refuse my love. I should be an utter villain if I asked you to love me without feeling sure that my love could never change. I shall ever love you, worship you as I would an angel. My whole life shall prove my love. Give me some hope, I beg."

The tears had risen to Lottie's eyes, and were streaming down her cheeks, but she turned her face away from Colner's, that he should not see her weeping, and answered, with an effort,

"No, Mr. Colner; I cannot; I dare not."

"You cannot ever love me?" asked Colner sadly. "I was a fool to think that you ever could. What have I in me that I should hope to win the love of one so pure, so good as yourself? But I had hoped that you might permit me to love you, and I had thought that in time, when you saw my devotion, that—that—" poor Colner could not continue.

"Do not wrong yourself thus," implored Lottie. "Indeed you are most good and noble. I admire you for your goodness and talents, and—and," here again Lottie's voice failed her.

"But you cannot love me," said Colner mournfully; "you cannot, perhaps, even like me."

"Oh, Mr. Colner," murmured Lottie, reproachfully, turning her tearful eyes towards him.

"Then you do like me!" cried Colner, eagerly looking into her eyes. The eyes fell beneath his gaze, but Colner had seen in them a gleam which revived his hopes. "You do like me!" he cried, and the next moment he was kneeling at her feet, and her little hands were clasped in his. "Oh! my darling," he exclaimed, passionately, "I feel that you will love me—that you do love me. Do not think of any differences of fortune, I implore you. Think that without you my life will be one long misery—think that I love you with all my heart, and soul, and strength—that I would die to make you happy. Look at me, Lottie, my own sweet darling. Do not cry, darling one; my life shall be devoted to making you happy. You do love me, do you not, my own dearest one? You cannot deny that you do love me just a little

bit—no, you cannot. Thank God, I am sure of your love now!"

Colner's strong right arm encircled Lottie's waist, and he strained her to his heart in a long embrace. Lottie offered no resistance; she had held out bravely, but the little loving heart could do so no more. Her head rested upon Colner's shoulder—ah! what happiness was that for him! He gently turned her face towards his, to kiss away her tears, and in the melting depths of those dark brown eyes he read the happy dawning of a love-dream that should last for ever.

For a long time did those two lovers sit together, discussing a variety of matters more or less connected with the love which each felt towards the other. Colner it was, however, who sustained the burden of the conversation. He endeavoured to explain to the lady of his heart how it had come about that he had fallen a victim to the gentle passion; but as he particularised events and sensations with a prolixity of the deepest possible interest to Lottie, but of little interest to others, we shall refrain

from giving his account of his surrender to the divine might of Eros. Suffice it to say that it was his firm conviction that the spirit of a benevolent Providence had guided him to Seaford, and that the same Providence had designed him and Lottie for each other. Then he extorted from his lady-love her confession, and Lottie, in the prettiest manner possible, told how she had been inspired with admiration of Coluer at first sight, and how her admiration had soon developed into a warmer feeling. They were intensely happy, as they sat there, each all in all to the other. Far from them was the world, with its sneers and frowns, its deceit and malice. For them there existed no world but that of their love, and that was a sweet world.

What is the happiest time of a mortal's existence? Looking down from the snow-capped pinnacle of age upon the valley through which one has passed—upon the mountain-side up which one has clambered—to what spot can mortal point and say, “'Twas there that I was happiest?” Childhood is a happy state, but it lacks reason. To a child the innumerable

trifles which to man are as naught, are fraught with an importance which makes them as painful to the child as bitterest trials are to the man. No child thinks itself perfectly happy, and perfect happiness is only possible when one is conscious of its possession. We have our own opinion as to the happiest moments in the life of man ; to that we are coming ; but first let us consider an opinion that is antagonistic to our own. We know a fair being, fair still, although three-score years have passed over her head. In childhood she was petted, in youth she was admired, and in the maturity of her days she was universally courted. Many were the suitors who vied with each other for the possession of her hand, and the comfortable independence thereto attached ; but to the prayers of all she turned a fickle ear, and pursued her course along the easy path of celibacy. In her pride of virginity, she is wont to boast that she has refused the offers of thirty-five lovers. Three or four times she has been engaged to be married—we ourselves have eaten of a cake that was to have graced her nuptial board—but ever before the day appointed for

the solemnization of the ceremony, she has turned again to the worship of Artemis, and bidden her wooer to seek for himself another bride. The opinion of such a lady must be not without value. It is her firm belief that no other time can vie in happiness with that in which a guileless maiden is wondering whether he who professes to admire her will make her a proposal or not. There is evidently something in this belief, for in most cases expectation is more delightful than reflection. Had our fair friend, however, married, she would, doubtless, have had cause to form a different opinion, and might have inclined to our own belief, that perfect happiness is the mean between anticipation and actual realization. To feel that your whole being is wrapped up in the being of another ; to flutter between hope and despair ; to be consumed by love for one who may not care for you ; to screw up your courage to the point of proposal, and then to be dazzled by the glorious discovery that you yourself are loved—ah ! that time is worth a life-time ; those moments of daze are the moments wherein you feel that you are perfectly happy. Is it not so, O reader ? If

thou thinkest otherwise, then assuredly thou hast never been thus dazed—thou hast never known perfect happiness. We pity thee!

The kindness of Mrs. Martin gave the lovers two hours to themselves. But what were two hours to Colner and Lottie? To them they seemed to be no more than ten minutes, and that must be Colner's excuse for wishing, when Mrs. Martin, closely followed by Miss Polly, entered the room, that the good old lady was gibbeted and Miss Polly dangling at her feet. Lottie arose and advanced to meet Mrs. Martin, who kissed her and wished her every happiness. Lottie blushed and smiled, and her confusion was increased by Polly's observing that she supposed she ought to wish her sister and Mr. Colner every happiness, likewise.

"Well, young people," said Mrs. Martin, "you have had a very long conversation together, and have, doubtless, arranged all your little plans. Polly, my dear, you will find some interesting sketches in that album. Now, Mr. Colner, will you tell me what course of action you have decided upon?"

Colner and Lottie looked at each other.

Their conversation had been of the past and present, not of the future. They had no thought for that.

"Really, Mrs. Martin," replied Colner, readily, "we shall be very much obliged to you if you will advise us upon that point."

"Of course you must see Mr. Williams at once, and obtain his consent."

"Oh! yes," cried Colner; "of course I must do that. I shall go and see him at once—today."

"Yes," said Mrs. Martin; "the sooner the better."

Polly thought to herself that this would hardly be the most advisable course of action. The room might be untidy, or her father in unbecoming apparel; anyhow it would be well to make some preparations for the reception of Colner.

"I think, Mrs. Martin," she said, significantly, "that Mr. Colner would be more sure of finding papa at home to-morrow morning. He is always at home in the morning."

"Ah! yes," answered the old lady, guessing Polly's reason for the suggestion, "perhaps it

would be better that you should see him in the morning."

"I should prefer to see him at once," said Colner. "What do you think?" he added, turning to Lottie.

Lottie had caught a telegraphic glance from Polly, and, accordingly, replied that she thought that it would be better for Colner to postpone his visit until the next day; to which advice her lover rather unwillingly consented; he therefore named nine o'clock the next morning as the hour when he should present himself to her father.

"Oh! that is much too early for pa—isn't it, Lottie?" cried Polly.

"I think that eleven o'clock would be better," replied her sister. "Papa is rather a late riser."

Eleven o'clock was agreed upon as being the best hour for soliciting the paternal consent.

"And now, my dear," said Mrs. Martin to Lottie, "let us go downstairs, for lunch is ready. Mr. Colner, will you take Lottie down? Polly, my dear, let me take your arm."

The four descended to the dining-room.

CHAPTER II.

GRAVE OBJECTIONS.

SEVERAL minutes before the hour appointed for his visit, Colner found himself in Greek Street, Soho. The dingy old street looked dingier than ever, for it was a dull, rainy morning, but to Colner it seemed the most charming street in the world—for did not his Lottie dwell in it? In his eyes, the dirty, smoke-blackened houses assumed a magnificence with which they had long been unfamiliar. To him every object in the street was of interest. He had prepared himself to admire everything that was in the least degree connected with his Lottie, and, therefore, he gazed with a lover's reverence at every object upon which the eyes of his lady-love might have rested.

The clock of a neighbouring church struck eleven, and Colner hastened to the house where-in dwelt his beloved. No need was there for him to look at the numbers of the houses, that he might ascertain in which of them resided Mr. Williams. He knew the particular house well enough, for had he not devoted several hours of the past night to a parade before it, thereby incurring the grave suspicions of more than one member of our police force ? Did he not know every window of the house ? Assuredly he did, if gazing upon them could have imparted the knowledge. Soon he reached the house, upon the doorstep of which stood a woman with bared arms, chaffering with a vendor of fish over the price of a diminutive haddock. She informed Colner that Mr. Williams lived three pair up. Having thanked her for the information, our lover bounded up the wide staircase, three steps at a time, and speedily found himself upon Mr. Williams' landing. He knocked at the portal, whereon was nailed the card of the occupant of that set of rooms, and it was opened by the charwoman, whom, by the aid of a large white cap and a spotless apron, the

girls had transformed into resemblance to a French *bonne*. With many a curtsey, she ushered the visitor into the room where Mr. Williams was sitting in expectation of his coming.

Colner was agreeably surprised by the appearance of Lottie's father. From Mrs. Martin's account, he had pictured Mr. Williams to himself as being something between a groom and a billiard-marker. He saw before him a good-looking, portly man, dressed quietly, but in perfect taste, whose general appearance was that of a retired military officer. Mr. Williams rose as Colner entered the room, and without offering to shake hands, bowed and requested his visitor to take a chair. Our lover seated himself, and was about to plunge *in medias res*, when Mr. Williams, by a gesture, stopped him.

"My daughter has explained matters to me, Mr. Colner. You have fallen in love with her, and think that your love is a serious one."

"Think, sir!" cried Colner, impetuously—"I am sure of it. I should never have revealed it had I not been certain that it is incapable of change."

"Very good, Mr. Colner. I am willing to give you every credit for the most honourable motives. I presume that your family is a Worcestershire one?"

"It is," answered Colner. "My father is member for Stickborough."

"Ah! yes—Mr. Octavius Colner. I used to know him very well. We were at Oxford together."

"Indeed!" said Colner, surprised. "May I ask if you are a friend of my father's?"

"We were friends at Oxford," replied Mr. Colner; "but since I left the University, I have lost sight of him. I knew your mother, too—she was a Miss Serrall. I trust that both of them are quite well."

Colner, marvelling at Mr. Williams' knowledge, thanked him for his inquiry, and assured him that his parents were, to the best of his belief, enjoying perfect health.

"Well, Mr. Colner," continued Mr. Williams, "we can talk this matter over as friends. Now let us consider it calmly. You are fond of my daughter."

"Fond!" exclaimed Colner—"that is a very

inadequate word to express my love for her. I worship the very ground upon which she treads."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Williams; "we know all about that. The long and short of the matter is, that you wish to marry her?"

"I do," said Colner, earnestly.

"At once?"

"As soon as ever I can," answered Colner. "I shall take my degree next Summer; and I should wish to marry as soon after that as may be."

"Very good, very good. Now, Mr. Colner, before I give my consent, before I express an opinion upon the subject, let us enter a little into ways and means. From what you say to me, I suppose that you are independent?"

"Well, not exactly," stammered Colner.

"Ah! not exactly, you say. That means, I presume, Mr. Colner, that you are dependent upon your father?"

"Yes," assented Colner, rather unwillingly.

"And have you spoken to your family upon this subject?"

"No, not yet," said Colner, beginning to feel uncomfortable.

" You have doubtless reason to suppose that your marriage with my daughter will be acceptable to them ?"

" Yes—at least, in time, I think—that is, I am sure that it will," answered Colner.

" But, Mr. Colner, there is a chance, is there not, that they may not approve of the marriage ?"

" I do not see why they should not approve of it."

" You do not ? That argues a little blindness on your part, Mr. Colner. Tell me frankly, do you not think, as, I must confess, I do, that they will disapprove of it *in toto* ?"

" Not when they know Lottie, I am sure," replied the lover.

" Not if they saw her with your eyes, Mr. Colner; but, unhappily, that cannot be. Then we are agreed upon this point—that at first, at all events, your marriage will be opposed to their wishes ?"

" At first, perhaps," said Colner; " but in time——"

" Ah ! yes, in time they may think differently of it. Let us take an extreme view of the

case. You are anxious to secure my daughter's happiness, of course?"

"It is my dearest wish!" exclaimed the lover.

"Well now, Mr. Colner, to take our extreme view, let us suppose that your parents, angry with you for marrying against their wishes, were to renounce you, you would not have a penny of your own to live upon?"

"They never could do such a thing!" cried Colner.

"But they might—such things have been done before this, you know. Supposing that such a thing happened, you and Lottie would be penniless, for she, as you may not be aware, will be absolutely portionless."

"I could work for her."

"My young friend, you do not know how difficult it is for a gentleman to find remunerative employment. Believe me that you would find it almost impossible to earn enough money to exist upon. When starvation stared you in the face, would not your love for Lottie alter? Should you not look upon her as the cause of your misery?"

"No, never!" exclaimed Colner, warmly. "Even supposing that such a state of things came to pass, I should deem it my duty to love her all the more. I should love her more dearly than ever."

"Do you think, though, that you could be happy when you saw Lottie in want?"

"Perhaps not—of course not; but I should strive to save Lottie from unhappiness."

"Could she be happy when she was starving? It is to be presumed that, were you to marry, you would have children. Could Lottie be happy when she heard them crying for food, which she could not give them?"

Colner was overwhelmed by the accumulation of horrors which Mr. Williams, in the blandest tone in the world, hinted as being the possible result of his marriage with Lottie. He could not answer Mr. Williams' last question; and that gentleman resumed—

"I have known what it is to have my children starving, Mr. Colner. I pray that a similar fate may never befall you. Your dearest wish is, as you say, to secure my daughter's happiness. Do you think it is for her happiness that she should

be exposed to the risks that I have just pointed out to you?"

"But," cried Colner, "such a picture as you have drawn is impossible. My parents could never be so hard-hearted as to let me starve. You have taken the blackest possible view of the case. There is not the least reason for supposing that such a case could ever apply to us."

"I have taken the safest view in the interest of my daughter, Mr. Colner. The case is this: your marriage with her may reduce you to beggary; with beggary must come starvation and concomitant evils."

"But there is not the least earthly reason why I should be reduced to beggary," cried Colner. "You take a most unfair view of the matter, Mr. Williams."

"No, I do not, Mr. Colner. Yours is a peculiar family—on your mother's side, at all events. You know, I presume, how it was that your mother came into all the Serrall estates."

"By inheritance, I believe," said Colner.

"Not exactly—at least, not by equitable inheritance. The Serrall estates had descended

from father to son, from childless or sonless owner, to the next of kin in the male line, for centuries. The name was a proud one, and its possessors strove to perpetuate it. Your grandfather it was who sacrificed the old name. Bearing ill-will towards his brother, who should have inherited the estates and title, he managed to cut off the entail, and all his property passed to his daughter, and from her into your family. His brother was left to beggary. Am I not right, Mr. Colner, in being careful, when I remember this little episode in your family history?"

"You amaze me, Mr. Williams!" said Colner. "May I ask how it is that you know these matters so well?"

"They were matters of general discussion when I was at Oxford," replied Mr. Williams, carelessly. "Well, Mr. Colner, taking all circumstances into account, I think that I should not be doing my duty as a father—may I also say, as a friend of yours?—were I to sanction your engagement to my daughter."

"But, sir," exclaimed Colner, aghast at the resolute tone in which Mr. Williams had pro-

nounced this decision, "pray do not think that ; let me beg of you not to refuse your permission. Indeed I cannot give your daughter up."

"I know that you love her now," said Mr. Williams, with an emphasis on the last word ; "but believe me that you will get over your love in time. You are very young."

"No, never !" cried Colner passionately ; "my love is not of a nature to change. I have told your daughter that I love her, and she has confessed that she returns my love. I cannot renounce my love ; I cannot, and, what is more, I will not !" and the young man looked defiantly at the father of his beloved.

"You are excited, Mr. Colner," said Mr. Williams, very calmly, "so I do not notice your last words. My dearest wish is that my daughters may be happy. I am convinced of the sincerity of your affection for Lottie, and, from what she tells me, I am sure that she loves you ; but, nevertheless, I am persuaded that it would be madness for you to engage yourself to her at present."

"But I consider myself as engaged to her. Have I not gained her consent ? Surely it is

too late now to talk of retracting. Can you expect me, as a gentleman, to do so?"

"Do you not think, Mr. Colner, that, as a gentleman, it was your duty to have spoken to me upon the subject, before talking of love to my daughter, a young girl of seventeen?"

"Indeed I should have done so, had I been able," declared Colner. "I have striven to find out your address from Mrs. Martin, but, until yesterday, I was unable to ascertain it."

"Ah! well, under the circumstances, perhaps, your conduct was not unnatural. You were doubtless betrayed into an expression of your sentiments, so I can excuse it. I thought it strange, too, that Lottie should have said nothing to me about having met you at Seaford. Well, well, the mischief is done. And so you have kept up your acquaintance with Mrs. Martin. She is a peculiar old woman; a little mad, I think. She hates me bitterly, for I accuse her of having cheated our dear Lottie out of eight hundred pounds. Doubtless she has told you curious things about myself."

Mindful of what Mrs. Martin had told him

about Mr. Williams, Colner could not deny this, so he sat silent.

“Ah, yes ; she is quite mad, I fear ; but she has the merit of loving our dear Lottie, and so I can forgive her the little calumnies which it pleases her to vent against me. I strive to do my duty by my children, Mr. Colner.”

“Of course,” assented Colner. “Then I may consider, Mr. Williams, that I have your permission to pay my addresses to your daughter?”

Mr. Williams shook his head gravely, and answered,

“I can well believe, Mr. Colner, that your happiness is bound up in that of my daughter. Under more fortunate circumstances, I should feel as pleased as I feel honoured by your love for her. As it is, you perceive that there are many grave objections to your marrying her. I am not willing to play the part of an obdurate father ; to secure Lottie’s happiness I would make any sacrifice. Suppose, then, that we discuss this matter again in a few months’ time. By that time I hope to be in a different position.”

This concession on the part of Mr. Williams

encouraged Colner to hold out for something more. It was, therefore, in more confident tones that he replied to the suggestion,

“Time can make no difference to me. A year hence I shall love Lottie as passionately as I love her now. Why, then, should you keep me in a state of suspense?”

“When do you take your degree?” asked Mr. Williams.

“Next Summer term.”

“Well, then, let us postpone further discussion until after that event. You will have plenty to do, what with work and boating—for I know of your reputation as an oar—to occupy your mind until then.”

“Do you think that I could work when in a state of suspense as to my future happiness?”

“My dear Mr. Colner, I think that you are very unreasonable. May I ask you to explain your wishes?”

“I wish you to consent to my considering myself engaged to your daughter at once. Practically we are engaged, you know, already.”

“Well,” said Mr. Williams, “and then?”

“ I shall go home and tell my father and mother of my engagement. When they see that I am irrevocably engaged to Lottie, they will recognise the futility of opposing my design. At all events, I shall learn my fate, and what I have to expect from them.”

“ And supposing that they refuse their consent?”

“ Come what may, Mr. Williams, I shall never give up Lottie. No earthly consideration can make me do so.”

“ But if they withdraw their support from you?”

“ Even in that case, affairs cannot be so very bad for us, for, as I daresay you know, my father’s property is strictly entailed, and must eventually come to me. At the worst, our poverty can be but temporary.”

“ Your father is not an old man; he may live these twenty or thirty years,” objected Mr. Williams, shaking his head.

“ I trust that he may,” replied Colner; “ but really your apprehensions as to his refusal of consent are groundless. I am convinced that

he will act justly towards me. He is a very good-hearted man."

"Has your mother much influence over him?"

"Yes, but I believe that I am her favourite son. She is of by no means an implacable nature."

"I am more afraid of her than I am of your father," observed Mr. Williams.

"Believe me," said Colner, "that there are no grounds for fear. When they know that I am actually engaged to Lottie, and see that my whole happiness is centred in her, they will cease to offer opposition."

"Well, Mr. Colner, I presume that you would hardly make so confident an assertion, had you not good grounds for believing what you say. Let us, therefore, ascertain the result of your communication with your parents before discussing the matter farther. Should you obtain their consent, I, of course, shall have no objection."

"But," objected Colner, "I must tell them that I am actually engaged to Lottie. If I could not do that, of course they would raise

objections. I have thought the matter over most carefully, and I am convinced that my plan is the best one."

"Perhaps you are not in a position to be capable of careful deliberation," said Mr. Williams, gravely.

"Oh, yes, I am," cried the lover; "I have anticipated and provided against every possible objection."

"Including mine?" asked Mr. Williams, significantly.

"Well, no, not exactly," replied Colner, with some confusion. "I did not think that you could have any objection—I mean, I was sure that Lottie's father must be too kind-hearted to ruin my happiness and that of his daughter."

"Thank you for your good opinion, Mr. Colner," said Mr. Williams, bowing. "According to your view of the case, however, my opinion on the subject cannot be of vital importance to you, seeing that you are prepared to disregard it. Well, supposing that I give my consent, will you promise me to observe certain conditions that I shall lay down?"

"Oh, yes, anything—everything!" cried Col-

ner, overjoyed at having overcome Mr. Williams' opposition.

"The first condition is, that you will make no attempt to see my daughter clandestinely."

"I agree to that gladly," said Colner.

"Then you must not waste too much of your time in writing to her. One letter, or two letters a month, ought to satisfy you. You must get on with your studies, and do well in your examination."

"But, Mr. Williams, that is too unreasonable. Say, rather, once a week—that is little enough."

"Well, I will waive that point. You may write to her once a week; then, lastly, you must promise me that, should your parents refuse their consent, you will be altogether guided by me in your course of action."

"Always supposing, of course," said Colner, "that you will not withdraw your consent."

"Yes; of course, after I have consented to your marrying my daughter, there can be no retraction."

"Then I gladly promise all that you ask."

"In that case," said Mr. Williams solemnly,

"I formally consent to your proposals, and I pray that I may never have cause to repent of my consent."

"You never shall, my dear Mr. Williams!" cried Colner, shaking the hand of the father with an energy that brought an exclamation of pain to the worthy father's lips. "My whole life shall be devoted to securing Lottie's happiness. I thank you most deeply for your consent. May I see Lottie now?"

"Presently," said Mr. Williams, smiling at the young man's eagerness. "It is right that I should explain to you certain matters which affect Lottie."

"You doubtless mean about her uncle," interrupted Colner, impatiently. "Mrs. Martin told me all about that. Believe me that I rejoice at Lottie's having no money, for it will prove that my love is disinterested."

"I do not think that anyone could accuse you of interestedness, Mr. Colner. But, for my daughter's sake, you should wish her to be an heiress. Think what a different reception she would meet with at the hands of your family, were she but rich."

"Perhaps," said Colner; "but when they know her, they will love her for her own dear sake. Besides, there is no chance of her ever being rich through her uncle, is there?"

"I should grieve deeply if I thought that," replied Mr. Williams. "Yes, I think that there is every chance of her coming in for the inheritance out of which she is, for the time being, kept."

"But how?" asked Colner, interested, in spite of his eagerness to see the object of his affections.

"Her uncle assured me, last Summer, that he had made a will in her favour; and I have no reason to believe that he was capable of telling a falsehood. It is my firm belief that, sooner or later, this will must be discovered. The will under which the Coulters have come in for Mr. Wilson's property is dated as far back as 1853. Mr. Wilson had good reason for altering it."

"I had rather not share in your belief that another will is in existence," said Colner. "I love Lottie for herself, and, to tell you the truth, should prefer her not to come in for her uncle's fortune."

“That is a foolish preference, Mr. Colner, and also a very selfish one. Do you not see how Lottie’s position in your family would be benefited by her being an heiress?”

“Yes, there is that, to be sure,” said Colner; “but it is unwise to hold a hope which may be disappointed.”

“Not at all,” replied Mr. Williams. “What is hope? Is it not happiness? Can there be happiness without it?”

“I am corrected,” answered Colner; “but what I desired to explain was, that I did not wish to depend upon what was, at best, a mere chance.”

“It is something more than a mere chance, I think,” said Mr. Williams. “That is why I wished you to wait before giving my consent to your engagement. I am a man who has lived upon hope all his life, but, in this case, I feel that my hopes amount to a certainty.”

“I trust that they may prove so,” said Colner.

“Apart from this will,” continued Mr. Williams, “there is a chance that the next few months will see a very great change in my for-

tunes. This was another reason for my wishing to postpone your engagement. This room, Mr. Colner, is hardly the one in which I should like to receive a visit from your father and mother."

"I shall not require to make any excuses for it, Mr. Williams," said Colner, bowing.

"No, because you are a gentleman; it is only the snob who despises poverty. Well, to revert to your engagement, I suppose that you will go down to Stickborough at once and explain matters to your parents?"

"I should like to remain in town for a few days," pleaded Colner.

"I think that you had better get the affair over at once," said Mr. Williams; "unless, indeed, you will accede to my wishes, and let the matter rest until after you have taken your degree. In that case, however, I cannot allow you to see or correspond with Lottie."

"Oh! no," cried Colner, eagerly, "it is far better that I should tell them at once."

"Very well," assented Mr. Williams; "then you will, doubtless, leave town to-night?"

"Let me say to-morrow, instead," urged

Colner. "May I not pass the evening with you?"

"If you like, Mr. Colner. I shall not attempt to apologise for the reception that we can offer you—you will excuse all that. You know my position."

Colner protested that not the least apology was necessary. To him the presence of his beloved would have converted the meanest of rooms into the most splendid.

"Then at seven o'clock we shall expect you to take tea with us. I cannot offer you dinner, for I do not know what our household arrangements are."

Colner accepted the invitation more gladly than he had ever accepted invitation before, and then inquired if he might see his beloved that morning.

"Yes—I shall tell her that you are here. I shall only give you half-an-hour, Mr. Colner, for I wish to take my daughters for a walk. The rain has cleared off, and the day is fine. Perhaps you will join us in our walk?"

"With the greatest possible pleasure," said the lover.

"Very good; then I shall send Lottie to you." And Mr. Williams quitted the room.

Presently in tripped Lottie, blushing, and looking prettier in her agitation than Colner had ever seen her look before. Her head was soon nestling on her lover's shoulder; and he was pouring his assurances of love into her delighted ear. How speedily passed the time! Colner had not assured Lottie of his affection more than a hundred times, when the door opened, and in marched Mr. Williams and Polly, equipped for the walk. Lottie hurried off to prepare for her promenade, and soon the four sallied forth from the house, and proceeded down the street towards a more fashionable quarter of the town.

What a delightful evening Colner passed that day! Never had he or Lottie enjoyed evening so much; but truth compels the historian of their love to record an observation made by Miss Polly to her father, as the hour of midnight tolled from the neighbouring church. Leaning forward towards her father, lest her observation might be overheard, the ingenuous maiden whispered into the parental ear,

"I say, pa, isn't this awfully dull?"

Mr. Williams, stifling a yawn, nodded in assent, and took a speedy opportunity of reminding Colner of the lateness of the hour.

Colner did not go down to Stickborough the next day, nor the next, nor the one which succeeded that. When he was not in the company of his beloved, he was busy seeking out presents which might gratify her, or propitiate the good will of her father. Game of all kinds, accompanied by many an other delicacy, found its way to the gloomy old house in Greek Street. Mr. Williams' credit rose a hundred per cent.; and the numerous tradespeople with whom he was wont to deal, ceased to remind him of the existence of their little accounts. It was universally agreed in the neighbourhood that his accession to the fortune, which fame had magnified to ten thousand a year, was close at hand.

At last Colner was forced to leave London, but not before he had exhausted all the money which he had at his bank, and a further sum which he had obtained from his father. Christmas was at hand, and his father had invited a

large party to spend it at Stickborough. It was absolutely necessary that Colner should return home. His parting with Lottie was most affecting; and the vows of unalterable love and constant remembrance, which the two young people exchanged, would have inspired the veriest sceptic with belief in the everlasting nature of the affection which each felt for the other.

They were very happy, those two young people—happy in the pure strength of their love, and in their mutual trust. Before them, in the future, lay a beautiful smiling world, illumined by the sun of their affections; and over that world there swept not the faintest shadow. They saw the roses that bloomed on either side of their straight path, and beneath those roses their loving eyes could detect no thorn.

CHAPTER III.

THE CONSPIRACY.

IT was Christmas Day, and throughout the land the clangour of bells was pealing forth the summons to prayer and rejoicing. Unheeded, though, by the chief inmates of Langstone House rang out the joyous call. To them Christmas brought no cause of happiness; small reason had they for jubilation! Their hopes and prayers were far from Him to whom the holy Christmas-tide is sacred.

In the library of Langstone House sat Ralph and his brother, gravely and earnestly discussing a matter of deep interest. A look of perplexity was upon their brows.

“But, Ralph,” said the younger man, in reply to an observation of his brother’s, “we must not allow this. If she will not consent of her

own free will, we must find some means of compelling her to do so."

" You were too violent, Fred. You know that the Mater is as stubborn as a mule, when she takes a fancy into her head. You should have humoured her."

" It's all very well to say that, but could you have kept your temper, had you been in my place? Just when all my plans are cut and dried, to have them ruined by her idiocy!—oh! it is too much!" and the young man shrugged his shoulders in disgust.

" Well, we must not despair. Let us try once more. We must appeal to her love for us, and pitch it into her hot and strong. We shall get over her yet."

" I am utterly disgusted at her conduct," said Fred, with a comment upon his mother that argued much for the truth of this assertion. " There does not seem to be the least risk in the case, and yet she is afraid to help me!"

" No; I must confess that your plan is a good one. The Mater is changed of late; she isn't the same woman that she was a year ago."

" She hasn't got over old Wilson's death.

She is always harping upon it. I shall not be at all surprised, Ralph, if she lets out something to somebody, one of these days."

"All the more reason for getting matters settled as soon as possible," observed Ralph.

"But I must say that, as matters stand, I don't see the least chance of bringing the affair off."

"You may have lost your chance, Fred. I tell you what I will do. If you give the girl up to me, I will try my luck."

"Thank you!" said his brother; "but I have no intention of doing any such thing."

"The Mater is suspicious of you, Fred. You had better resign your chance to me. If you consent to this, I will give you a note for ten thousand pounds, payable within a month of my marriage with her."

"You're very kind," answered Fred, with a sneer, "but I consider my chance worth more than that. Besides, I like the looks of the girl, and should not have the least objection to marrying her. One must marry some time or other, I suppose, and she'll do as well as any other girl for me."

"Don't spoil the whole game by your obstinacy," urged the elder brother. "The Mater would be more inclined to help me than to assist you."

"I am not going to give my chance up, Ralph—so that's flat! Tell me, will you help me or not?"

"Oh! yes," answered Ralph; "I have promised to help you, on certain conditions. Before we go further into the matter, perhaps it may be as well that we should come to some definite understanding. I have drawn out an agreement; you sign it, and then you may rely upon my doing all that I can for you."

Ralph took from his pocket-book a slip of paper which he handed to his brother.

"What!" cried Fred, perusing it—"half of all that she may be entitled to! It is monstrous, Ralph! You can't expect me to agree to this."

"You forget that there is the Mater to be provided for. Sign this, and I will undertake to settle for her."

"No, by Jove!" exclaimed Fred; "it's unfair—it's a swindle! I won't sign it."

"I'll trouble you to be more careful in the

language you use towards me," said Ralph, with an angry look at his brother. "Can't you be contented with half the girl's money? I should only get a quarter, you see."

"But I shall have all the bother of marrying her, and all that sort of thing," replied Fred. "No, upon my word of honour, you are too exorbitant, Ralph."

"I am willing to take the bother, and to sign a paper giving you a quarter of her money, if you'll give her up to me," said Ralph.

"I'll make a quarter over to you, Ralph."

"No, that won't do; you forget the Mater."

"Devil a bit do I! I am willing to do as much for her as you would do, my dear Ralph."

"Sign this paper, and you may rely upon my help. Refuse to do so, and I shall have nothing more to do with you."

With a muttered oath, Fred seized a pen, and affixed his name to the document, which Ralph dated, and returned to his pocket-book.

"Now you are reasonable, Fred. Let us go to the Mater; she isn't up yet."

The brothers quitted the library, and made their way to their mother's bedroom. Mrs.

Coulter had not yet risen. She had become very weak of late ; her dark eyes were deeply sunken, and her face was haggard and thin. A sad picture of physical prostration she was, as she lay in her bed. The two sons seated themselves by her bedside.

“ Well, my dear mother,” said Ralph, taking her hand, “ how do you feel now ? Better, I trust. Fred and I want you to get up and come for a walk ; it is a lovely day.”

“ I do not feel well enough to go out to-day,” said Mrs. Coulter ; “ but thank you, my dear boys, for your kindness.”

“ I think that a walk would do you good,” urged Fred. “ Get up and come with us, there’s a dear old soul.”

“ Fred and I are quite anxious about your health, mother. You are not looking at all well.”

“ I am very well in health, dear Ralph, but my mind is not at rest. You and dear Fred are so unkind to me.”

“ My dearest mother,” cried Ralph, in deprecatory accents, “ do not accuse us of unkindness ! Our greatest wish is that you should be well and happy—is it not, Fred ?”

“Indeed it is, Ralph,” answered his brother, “I would not—no, not for worlds—make you unhappy, Mater.”

“But, my dear boys, you do make me most unhappy by your behaviour towards me, and by striving to do what I most earnestly beg of you not to do.”

“There, there, Mater,” said Ralph, soothingly, and kissing his mother, “you must forgive us for any little things we may have said. You know how anxious we are to act for the best, but we would do nothing to make you unhappy.”

“My dear Ralph,” sobbed Mrs. Coulter, touched by the unwonted kindness of her son, “I am sure that you would not. You know how dearly I love both of you.”

“That we do, Mater,” declared Ralph—“don’t we, Fred?”

“I believe you,” affirmed Fred. “You’re a dear old soul, Mater, and that’s a fact.”

“Then, my dear boys,” said their mother; “make me happy by giving up your design of drugging that girl.”

“We will, my dear mother,” answered Ralph,

with energy. "We will do anything to make you happy."

"There is a dear boy!" cried Mrs. Coulter. "I am so glad of this. No good could have come of it."

"Yes," continued Ralph, "why should we persevere with the scheme, when it is odious to you? No; we shall abandon it, and you shall be happy again."

"You make me very happy, dear Ralph. You are a dear, good boy. We must hope that a second will does not exist, and we must submit to the divine wish, should misfortune come upon us."

Fred looked at his brother, and elevated his eyebrows. This religious resignation on the part of his mother surprised him, for in bygone days Mrs. Coulter had had but little regard for the fulfilment of the divine wish.

"Yes, my dear mother," continued Ralph, "we shall bear our misfortunes like Christians. When we have to give up every farthing that we now possess, we shall at least have the satisfaction of knowing that we have done our duty. Shall we not, Fred?"

"Yes, that will be our consolation," said his brother.

"It will," said Ralph earnestly. "Serrall may strip us of everything that is now ours, he may reduce us to beggary, but we shall be resigned to our lot."

"We can beg our bread from door to door," observed his brother, in a tone of melancholy resignation.

"And our dear mother shall be happy," said Ralph, in a tone of deep affection. "Yes, even when she sees us beggared, when she sees that we have not a hope left, she shall be happy, and know that we have courted utter ruin sooner than make her miserable."

"But, my dearest boys," cried Mrs. Coulter, anxiously, "why do you apprehend such things? There is no reason to suppose that we shall be ruined. This second will may never be found. Should it be found, we shall still have my little fortune to fall back upon. All our debts are paid. Why, my dear boy, do you talk in this desponding manner?"

"Ah, my dear mother," answered Ralph, "you have not fully realised the extent of our mis-

fortunes. But, no matter, we must not give you cause for uneasiness. Let affairs turn out as they will, we shall bear the result like men, shall we not, Fred ?”

“Like Christians,” responded Fred, sighing deeply.

“But, Ralph, my dear Ralph,” exclaimed their mother, raising herself upon her elbow, and gazing anxiously into the face of her elder son, “what do you mean ?—what is the misfortune of which you speak ?”

“Oh, it is nothing, mother,” replied Ralph, with a look that belied his words; “it is nothing. Let us not make you anxious. Fred and I are resigned to our fate, and it shall be our effort to lighten yours.”

“Tell me, though,” cried his mother nervously, “what it is that you mean ? What fresh news have you ?”

“We must not alarm the Mater, must we, Fred ?”

“Oh no, Ralph. Let her, at all events, be happy.”

“But, my dearest boys,” exclaims their mother, wrought up to a pitch of extreme

anxiety, "you have heard some bad news. What is it? I implore you to tell me."

"Shall I tell her all, Fred?" asked Ralph.

"Perhaps you had better, Ralph?" answered Fred, wondering what on earth his brother meant.

"Yes, dear Ralph, pray tell me," begged Mrs. Coulter.

"Well, my dear mother," replied Ralph, "I grieve to say that it is ascertained, beyond the possibility of a doubt, that Serrall is in possession of the second will, which gives everything to his children, and beggars us."

"Ah!" gasped Mrs. Coulter, falling back upon her pillow, "then all is over! Thank God, this state of suspense is over at last. I have prayed for it to end."

The brothers looked at each other in disgust, at this expression of their mother's feeling. Ralph continued—

"Yes, all is over, and we are to be beggars. But never mind ruin, if it can make you happy, mother."

"Ruin, my dear Ralph," said Mrs. Coulter, again raising herself on her elbow; "you cannot

mean ruin. I shall have my four hundred a year, and we can live quietly upon that."

"Poor dear mother," said Ralph, pityingly. "You do not know the full extent of our danger. Do you know this Serrall? How is he disposed towards us?"

"He is a bad, wicked man," answered Mrs. Coulter; "I fear that he hates us bitterly."

"Of course he does," continued Ralph, rejoicing at the success of his last question. "He hates us, and he is going about everywhere declaring that he will make us refund every farthing of uncle's money that we have spent."

Fred turned aside to hide the smile which this monstrous falsehood evoked.

"What do you say?" exclaimed Mrs. Coulter. "Make us refund? Oh, he cannot do that."

"Yes, he can, my dear mother; can't he, Fred?"

"Every halfpenny of it," affirmed Fred.

"With costs, too," continued Ralph; "in fact, my dear mother, I doubt whether your little fortune of four hundred a year will be enough to meet half the claims against us. We have spent over five thousand pounds, you

know, in paying off debts ; then there is a quarter's income that we have got rid of. Altogether I suppose we have spent some eight thousand pounds. I do not think that your property will realize more than half of that, will it, my dear mother ?”

“ Oh ! my dear boys !” cried Mrs. Coulter, “ what shall we do ? What is to become of us ?”

“ I have not the faintest idea, my dear mother,” answered Ralph. “ At all events, the state of suspense, which is so irksome to you, will be over. Fred and I will try to bear ruin like men, shall we not, Fred ?”

“ Yes ; with Christian resignation,” affirmed Fred.

“ But, Ralph, dear Ralph, we shall be ruined. Oh ! whatever are we to do ?”

“ We must submit to the Divine wishes, should misfortune overtake us,” said Ralph, in his mother's words.

“ We shall be beggars. That man Serrall will ruin us. Oh ! what will become of us !” moaned Mrs. Coulter.

"There is the workhouse, mother," said Ralph.

"Or we might turn labourers, and dig, or do something of that kind," suggested Fred.

"Yes, we may labour, and live in a hovel, and wear rags, and eat dry bread," continued Ralph.

"And when all else failed, we could cut our throats."

"Drowning is cheaper. We might not be able to buy a knife to cut our throats with."

"Anyhow, our mother will be happy," said Fred.

"Yes," assented Ralph; "she will then know how dearly we loved her—she will know that, to secure her happiness, we willingly resigned fortune when it was within our grasp, and welcomed ruin and starvation."

"You will drive me mad!" exclaimed their mother.

"Dearest mother, do not say so," said Ralph, beseechingly. "Our only object is to make you happy. Are we not seeking to prove it?—are we not willing to give up all for you?"

“ Yes, all in the world to make you happy, Mater,” assented Fred, in accents of the fondest devotion.

“ Without the least risk, we may secure fortune for life; but were we to secure it, you would be unhappy. Perish fortune, that would make you unhappy, dear mother.”

“ My dearest boys,” asked Mrs. Coulter, eagerly, “ can this be true? Is the will indeed found? Is Serrall so cruel ?”

“ It is, alas! but too true. Isn’t it, Fred ?”

“ It is indeed, Ralph,” answered Fred.

“ Oh! what shall we do?—what shall we do ?” moaned their mother, covering her face with her hands.

“ We can do nothing, mother. There is but one course open to us, and that we shall never pursue—shall we, Fred ?”

“ No, never,” declared Fred, solemnly.

“ No,” continued Ralph; “ although absolutely free from risk, and almost certain of success.”

“ Quite certain, you may say,” observed Fred.

“ Yes, quite certain. Still, as it would make the Mater unhappy, we abandon it. What

matters our ruin, in comparison with her happiness?"

"Nothing," declared Fred. "Let us make her happy."

"My dear Ralph, dear Fred, do not talk like that," implored their mother. "I would do anything in the world to secure your happiness and welfare. What must I do?"

"Never mind our happiness, Mater," said Ralph. "Let us only think of yours."

"Oh! do not think of me," pleaded their mother. "What is the means of escape from the ruin that threatens us?"

"Let us not talk of that, dear mother," said her elder son. "There is but one means of escape, and that is opposed to your wish. No, let us submit to ruin and beggary."

"Tell me—I pray you to tell me," begged Mrs. Coulter. "Fred, dear Fred, what does Ralph mean?"

"He means by my marriage with that girl, Mater," replied Fred. "But I will never marry her, if by doing so I shall make you unhappy—no, never."

"But the terrible risk, my dearest boy! The

drug!—the danger!—oh! no, it must not be.”

Ralph noticed a certain indecision in his mother's tones, which seemed to denote that her opposition to the proposed plan was by no means insuperable.

“ My dearest mother,” he said, soothingly, “ pray do not distress yourself. Have we not told you that we have given up all idea of this marriage? Yes, although it is our sole means of escape from the horrors of beggary and starvation, we give it up, solely to make you happy.”

“ It is so dangerous a means,” exclaimed Mrs. Coulter. “ If anything happened, what would become of us ?”

“ Do not think of it, mother, I beg,” said Ralph. “ True that there is not the slightest danger to be apprehended ; nevertheless, it is opposed to your wish, and that is enough for us, isn't it, Fred ?”

“ Yes,” declared Fred. “ We must respect the Mater's scruples ; we must not think of our ruin and misery.”

“ Pray do not talk like that, my dear boy,”

begged Mrs. Coulter. "Can you think that I would be the cause of your ruin? Oh! no, no!"

"But, my dear mother, never mind us," said Ralph. "If we do not get hold of this girl, we must expect ruin, and perhaps something worse. Well, we are resigned to our fate, are we not, Fred?"

"Yes, quite resigned," answered Fred, with the air of a martyr.

"My dearest boys, I am distracted with grief!" cried their mother. "Do not talk of ruin; there must be some means of escape from it."

"None, my dear mother," declared Ralph, "except that which I have pointed out to you."

"Oh! but the drug! Is there no other means of effecting your purpose?"

"Dearest mother," said Ralph, "we have explained to you that this black drop is not a drug—it is a perfectly harmless opiate; there is no risk in using it."

"But, dear Ralph, Dr. Ellaby says that it is a very powerful drug."

"He was thinking of something else, doubtless. This stuff of ours is a simple opiate—a very mild one too, is it not, Fred?"

"Oh! yes," answered his brother,—"as mild and harmless as a little pet lamb, Mater."

"Are you sure that it can do no harm?" asked their mother, hesitatingly.

Ralph looked at his brother with an expression of triumph on his dark features.

"I assure you most solemnly, Mater," he replied, "that it is perfectly harmless."

"Well, my dear boy, how did you think that you could administer it?"

"We should have needed your help in the case, mother. But never mind," said Ralph, sighing; "that is all over, and we must prepare for ruin and misery."

"If I thought that there was no danger——" said Mrs. Coulter, anxiously.

"There would have been none, Mater."

"Well, dear Ralph, tell me what you wish me to do."

"Is it your wish, then, that we should go on with the case?" asked Ralph. "Consider your happiness, mother."

"Yes, never mind our ruin and misery," added Fred.

"Dearest boys!" cried the mother, "do not think of me. I only wish to secure your welfare. Tell me what you propose to do; if I can, I will help you."

"That is a dear, good mother!" said Ralph. "Well, as you wish us to carry out our scheme, to make you happy, we shall consent to do so."

"Yes, solely to make you happy, Mater," put in Fred.

"But tell me what it is," demanded their mother.

"It is Fred's plan. Explain it to the Mater, Fred."

"It is very simple, Mater," said Fred. "We must take some opportunity, when the girl is alone in the house, to induce her to go somewhere with us."

"But how?" asked Mrs. Coulter.

"Oh! easily enough. When she is alone we can go to her and say that her father has met with an accident, and is in a house close by. Of course she will go with us at once. Then

we can give her the opiate, and when she is under its influence we can take her down into the country, and get the whole affair settled straight off."

"But, dearest Fred," objected Mrs. Coulter, "there seem to be many difficulties in the case. How can you induce her to take the opiate?"

"There are no difficulties at all, Mater," said Fred. "You must make her take the opiate."

"I!" cried Mrs. Coulter; "my dearest boy, I could never do such a thing."

"If you don't, mother, we shall fail, and then misery, ruin, and shame will be our portion."

"But how can I do it? My dear boy, pray do not ask me to do so," pleaded Mrs. Coulter.

"The thing is quite simple, mother," urged Fred. "You must meet the girl in the house to which we shall take her. You must tell her that she must take a glass of wine before seeing her father. She will take it. What difficulty is there in that?"

"But the risk, my dear boy."

"We have told you already that there is no risk, the opiate is quite harmless," said Ralph.

"I mean the risk of detection," explained his mother.

"Oh, as for that," said Fred, "you need have no fear. We shall arrange the affair so as to make it look like an elopement. Don't be afraid of that, Mater."

"Doesn't the thing seem very easy and feasible?" asked Ralph, as his mother lay silent.

"Perhaps, perhaps," sighed his mother.

"Then you will help me, Mater?" asked Fred. "Now be a dear old soul; it's all for your happiness."

"I fear that my courage will fail me; I am so unwell, my dear boy," said Mrs. Coulter.

"That is a good Mater," cried Fred, taking her answer for consent. "Now we need fear nothing."

"No," asserted Ralph, "we are sure of success."

"Do get up, Mater, and come out for a walk."

"Yes, do. A walk will do you a world of good. You look rather pale, dear mother," said Ralph, tenderly.

"Yes, I feel unwell, my dearest boys. I shall get up though, now. I do not feel equal to a

walk, but I should like a drive in the park."

"All right, Mater, I shall order the carriage.
Can we do anything for you?"

"Ring the bell, please, dear. Thank you,
that is all."

"Bye-bye, for the present, then, dear mother,"
said Ralph. "Come along, Fred," and the
brothers quitted their mother's room.

From that morning, a great change for the better took place in Mrs. Coulter's health. Her sons vied with each other in attention to their mother, upon whose co-operation they were dependent for the successful issue of their iniquitous scheme. Never had mother two more devoted sons. They studied her wishes in every little matter, and laboured to convince her, by every means in their power, that her happiness was the sole object for which they were striving. With the return of health to Mrs. Coulter came back much of the old vigour of her character, and gradually she became reconciled to what her sons induced her to believe was the only means of escaping utter ruin.

The sons themselves believed that their ruin was imminent. They had, in vain, ransacked

the house, and examined every book in it, in the hope of finding that second will, of the existence of which they were now fully persuaded. They had not lost sight of Mr. Williams, and they had ascertained the fact of Lottie's engagement to Colner. This filled them with alarm, for they argued that Lottie's expectations had been the bait that had attracted her lover. A second visit to Mr. Yard's shop had confirmed their fears, for they learnt from the linen-draper, who professed to have learnt it from Mr. Williams, that the Christmas vacation was the sole cause of delay in establishing the claim of the two girls to the fortune. Clearly a blow must be struck at once. As for Lottie's engagement, that did not complicate matters much, for what man, argued Fred, would trouble himself about a girl who, he had reason to suppose, had eloped with some other fellow ?

CHAPTER IV.

THE PRUDENCE OF PARENTS.

TIME passed very quickly for Herbert Colner, at Stickborough, without enabling him to make the fact of his engagement known to his parents. Eagerly as he longed to confess to them his love for Lottie, his heart failed him as he recognised the many objections which they would assuredly raise against his engagement to her, and, therefore, he forebore to create an opportunity for confession, and abided a favourable chance. The house was full of people, and festivity was the order of the day. Much against his will, Herbert was compelled to devote day after day to field-sports. When, at last, he managed to get a bye, he lost the opportunity of seeking his mother and unbosom-

ing himself to her; for, he assured himself, she must be too much occupied in attending to her guests to be able to listen to his tale. Not in vain, though, had Herbert foregone the chase of the wily fox, for, thereby, he was enabled to devote eight hours to the composition of a long letter to the lady of his love—hours which his mother fondly thought were devoted to literary research. Mrs. Colner was rather anxious about her son, for she marked a certain change in him, and attributed it to over-study. Much as she wished Herbert to do well at the University, she had no wish that he should injure his health by working too hard; she, therefore, begged him to be very careful.

“ You have been working for eight hours, my dear Herbert,” she said, interrupting her son in his writing. “ You have had no lunch, nor have you been out to-day. I must insist upon your leaving off work now.”

There was a chance for Herbert!—he might have seized it, had not his mother proceeded to unfold to him her hopes and plans for his future career. He had not the courage to dash her hopes to the ground just then, so that chance

of confession escaped him. It is to be feared that Herbert evinced anything but resolution in this crisis. It had been his original intention to make his confession to his mother, and to solicit her intervention with his father; then he fancied that there would be less opposition from his father than from his mother, and made up his mind to confess to him in the first instance. Fortune threw in his way a chance of doing so, and it then occurred to our lover that the very best plan of all would be to confess to both at the same time. Poor Herbert! he would have given worlds to have the confession well over, and to know the worst, for he felt like a soldier who has the knowledge that the ground beneath him is mined, but whom no fear of an explosion can drive from his position.

Two days more passed, bringing a letter from Lottie, which, to Colner's enraptured fancy, seemed like a missive from Paradise. He read and re-read it for hours. It breathed a spirit of the sweetest love and anxiety for the absent lover. How bitterly did he repent of the irresolution which had hitherto prevented his declaring himself to his parents! Was he ashamed

of Lottie? The burning blush which dyed his face, as this thought suggested itself to him, testified to the shame which the mere idea of such a thing caused him. Was he a coward? Yes, he owned to himself, in bitter self-abasement, he must be a coward. What had he to fear? Fear! Should he entertain the slightest fear when his loved one's happiness was at stake? No, never!—he would seek out his parents at once, and know the worst. Come what might, Lottie's love would reconcile him to their displeasure.

Full of this determination, Colner proceeded in quest of his mother, whom he begged to accompany him to his father's study. Mrs. Colner was rather astonished at so unusual a request, but her son would offer no explanation. They found Mr. Colner in his study, writing letters. He looked up as they entered.

“Herbert has requested me to come here,” explained Mrs. Colner. “He has something to tell us.”

The Member for Stickborough looked at his son, upon whose face were visible traces of the emotion which he was endeavouring to stifle.

"Well, boy," he said—"what is it? Be quick, for I have letters to write, and Giles has brought that new horse over for me to look at it. What do you want?"

"I want to speak to you about something that is of great importance—the greatest importance to me," began Herbert.

"The deuce you do!" cried his father. "What have you been doing?—getting into debt, eh? How much is it? You boys will ruin me between you. What the devil do you mean by getting into debt? Don't I allow you enough?—eh, boy?"

"You allow me ample, father, but——"

"Then you've been gambling? Yes, begad, the boy has been gambling! Haven't I warned you that I shall never forgive a son of mine who gambles? And what excuse have you to offer for this disgraceful conduct—eh, boy?"

"Let Herbert tell us all about it, Octavius," said Mrs. Colner. "What is the matter, Herbert?"

"Yes, begad, tell us all about it, boy. You've been gambling. What have you lost?"

"I have neither gambled nor got into debt, father," replied Herbert; "but I——"

"Yes, I knew it!" cried Mr. Colner. "He has been putting his name to bills. He has taken the first step to ruin—he has, begad!"

"No, I have not, father," said Colner. "It is quite another thing. I have—I mean, there was, or rather"—here the lover paused. His father snapped him up.

"Well, boy, well? What have you been doing? What mischief have you got into? What disgraceful thing is it? I can see that it is disgraceful—yes, begad, I can see it in your hang-dog look! Go on—why the devil won't the boy go on? He is ashamed of himself—he is, begad!"

"Permit Herbert to explain himself," said Mrs. Colner. The womanly instinct had taken the alarm. There could be but one explanation of Herbert's nervousness.

"Yes, explain yourself, boy. Don't hum and haw there like a magpie with a bone in its throat. Explain yourself at once."

"I'm afraid, father," began Herbert—"I mean that I have seen a young lady, and—and——"

"You've seen a young lady, have you? So have I. I have seen scores and hundreds of them. They never did me any particular harm. What if you have seen a young lady? Did she bite you? Begad, I have it!—the boy has fallen in love! Didn't I know it?—wasn't I sure that he had been making a fool of himself?"

"Tell me, Herbert," said Mrs. Colner, very anxiously, "can this be true? Have you indeed been weak enough to fall in love? Who is the young lady?"

"Who!" cried her husband—"can't you guess who? Why, it's that girl Rosa Harris. Didn't you see them spooning together the other day? That's who it is—yes, begad, she has twiddled him round her little finger."

Poor Herbert repelled the charge indignantly.
"I was ordinarily polite to Miss Harris—nothing more. As for loving her, she is the last girl in the world I should ever think of falling in love with."

"Well, she's not a bad girl," said his father; "she rides well, and is very well made. You might have done worse."

“Pray, Octavius,” said Mrs. Colner, with dignity, “do not think of such a thing. The idea of that girl’s being thought good enough for Herbert! The Harrises are very nice people, in their way, but you forget that there are six children, and that Major Harris has not more than twelve hundred a year. It would be madness for Herbert to think of such a thing.”

“Well, boy, if it isn’t the Harris girl, who is it? Out with it! Begad, have you lost your tongue?”

“The young lady’s name is Williams, father,” answered Herbert. “You knew her father up at——”

“Williams!—ah! yes—Sir Everard Williams, of Staffordshire,” interrupted Mr. Colner. “A fine old fellow—a straight rider, too. But—yes—begad, it’s a fact; his daughter is considerably over thirty, and has a face like a weasel’s.”

“Surely, Herbert, you cannot mean that creature?” cried Mrs. Colner. “She has money, but, my dear boy, she would never do for you. Think of her age!”

“No, it isn’t that Miss Williams, mother.”

“Then who the devil is it?” asked his father,

impatiently. “Williams isn’t an uncommon name. What Williams do you mean, boy, eh ? ”

“Her father was a friend of yours at St. Kenelm’s.”

“Williams ! I don’t recollect anyone of that name being at St. Kenelm’s with me. Stop a minute ; I will look at the Calendar,” and Mr. Colner rose, and took an old Oxford Register down from a bookshelf.

“What is his county, Herbert ? ” asked his mother.

“He lives in London, mother,” answered her son.

“Ah ! ” said Mrs. Colner, “I do not like that. I should have wished you to marry—when your marriage became desirable—some one who was connected with Worcestershire—some one whose connection would have been of service to you in after-life, in our own county. What is this Mr. Williams ? Is he a man of eminent position ? ”

“No, mother,” answered Herbert.

“Not a man of eminent position ! Then he can have but little interest, I suppose. What is he ? ”

“ He does nothing,” replied her son.

“ Dear me !” said his mother, shaking her head. “ Is he a man of large fortune ?”

“ No, mother,” answered Herbert, briefly.

“ Not a man of large fortune ! Will his daughter have money, then ?”

“ No, mother,” said Herbert boldly, “ not a penny.”

“ What !” cried Mrs. Colner, lifting up her hands in horror. “ My dear Herbert, do you mean to tell me that you have had the madness to fall in love with a girl who has no money, and whose father is a nobody ?”

“ Did you say that this Williams was at St. Kenelm’s with me, eh, boy ?” asked Mr. Colner, perusing the Register.

“ Yes, father ; he told me that he was.”

“ Then he told you a lie,” said Mr. Colner, closing the Register ; “ I thought that I did not remember the name. I see that there was nobody of the name of Williams at St. Kenelm’s, within five years of my time. Yes, begad, he has told you a deliberate falsehood !”

“ My dear Herbert,” said his mother, “ pray explain this horrid affair. Who is this Mr.

Williams? Is he a person of any position in society?"

"Yea, boy, explain yourself. Who is this fellow?"

"He lives in London," answered Herbert. "He has had reverses—he is not well off; but he—"

"Not well off!" exclaimed Mrs. Colner. "My dear Herbert, how could you be so imprudent as to become acquainted with him? Has he many children?"

"Only two daughters, mother," said Herbert, feeling very uncomfortable at his father's repudiation of all knowledge of Mr. Williams.

"And is he in society?" asked Mrs. Colner, anxiously.

"Well, mother," stammered her son, "not exactly, but—"

"Goodness gracious!" cried his mother. "My dear Herbert, you must be mad to dream of having anything to do with him. I must insist upon your giving up all thoughts of this girl. Such folly can never be permitted."

"What the devil do you mean by it, boy?" asked his father. "Marry the daughter of a

beggar!—of a man who has no standing in the world! No, begad, I'll be hanged if you do! You must give her up at once. Do you hear what I say, boy, eh?—you must give her up."

"I cannot do that," answered Herbert, firmly, "for I am engaged to her already."

Mrs. Colner fell back in the easy-chair in which she was sitting. Again her hands were upraised in horror. Mr. Colner started from his chair and faced his son, who rose, likewise, and returned his father's look without flinching. Mr. Colner turned red with anger.

"What!" he cried, "you engaged without my consent? Without saying with your leave, or by your leave, to me or your mother? Begad, sir, I never!—no, I swear I never did! You must give her up. Do you hear me, boy? Do you intend to obey me, eh? Begad, you shall give her up, or I'll know the reason why!"

"I did not think, sir," said his son, calmly, "that you judged a man by his money."

"By his money, boy? I never judge a man by his money. I do not care a farthing rushlight for his money!—no, not half a farthing rushlight for his money! But I say that you

shall not marry this girl, and, begad, when I say a thing, I stick to it!"

Mrs. Colner tried to put in a word here; but her husband stopped her, and resumed more volubly—

" You'll marry this girl, will you?—an artful, designing minx! Don't interrupt me, boy. She saw what a fool you were. Yes, begad, she set her cap at an idiot, and she caught him. Didn't I tell you that the boy was an idiot? Yes, hang me if I didn't! I knew it well enough. But you shall give her up, boy. Yes, you shall, begad, or I'll—I'll," and Mr. Colner paced the room in rage.

" Where did you meet this young person?" asked Mrs. Colner, with a slighting accent upon the last word.

" At Seaford," answered her son.

" Ah," gasped Mrs. Colner. How she had been deceived! The time that she thought Herbert had devoted to study, that time had been worse than wasted. Alas, for all her hopes!

" At Seaford!" cried Mr. Colner. " I knew it; didn't I tell you so? I was certain that the boy

did not stop there all the Summer for the sake of reading. I knew that he wasn't there for any good purpose. Yes, begad! I foresaw it all. But you shall give this girl up. Yes, hang me, you shall give her up. Promise me that you will. Now, none of your equivocations, boy. Promise at once."

"I cannot, father," said Herbert, with determination.

"You cannot? Begad, we shall see about that. You will marry this beggar—not that I care about money; no, no man in the world cares less for it than I do. You will marry the daughter of a—a man who is a—yes, a ruined man—perhaps a bankrupt—yes, a fraudulent bankrupt; a man who says that he knew me; a liar? Oh! begad, we shall see if you will marry her."

"Indeed, Herbert," said his mother, "you must give up this insane idea. You must break matters off."

"He shall break matters off," roared his father. "Hark you, boy, I am not going to be disobeyed. I shall give you till to-morrow morning to break this disgraceful affair off."

"It is not a disgraceful affair," declared Herbert, angrily. "The young lady is——"

"I don't care a hang what she is. I say that you shall not marry her, and, begad, you shall not! I give you till to-morrow morning to break it off, and if by that time you haven't done it—I will—yes, begad, you shall see what I will do!"

Mr. Colner put his unfinished letter into his desk, slammed the lid down, locked the desk, and quitted the room, muttering that he would be obeyed or he should know the reason why—he should, begad.

"My dear Herbert," said Mrs. Colner, when her husband had departed, "you have surprised me, I may say that you have pained me, exceedingly. Do you mean to tell me that, for the sake of a pretty face, you can meditate the sacrifice of all your prospects?"

"It is not for the sake of a pretty face, mother," replied Colner, earnestly. "My love for Miss Williams is inspired by no mere beauty; to me she would be equally dear were she utterly destitute of good looks. I love her for her pure, sweet nature; I look upon her as an angel."

I love her with all my heart and soul, and, mother dear, I cannot give her up."

Colner pronounced the last sentence in a voice rendered tremulous by the depth of his emotions. There was a tone of passionate appeal in his words that touched his mother's heart. What woman can be senseless to a confession of love? Mrs. Colner was touched, but she had her duty as a mother before her eyes; she thought of the brilliant career that was open to her son. Was this to be sacrificed? Not if she could prevent it. She, therefore, steeled her heart to the feeling of sympathy, to which for one brief moment she had yielded, and in cold accents combated her son's resolve.

" You, doubtless, think that this young person is all that is good and perfect, now; but, my dear Herbert, you cannot know your own mind. You are young and inexperienced in the ways of the world. Were you a little older you would see, as I do, that it would be worse than folly for you to marry her. What! marry a girl whose father has no position, a girl who is penniless? My dear Herbert, it would be madness, absolute madness on your part."

“I have formed my own opinion as to that, mother.”

“Such a thing would be your ruin,” continued his mother, not noticing his words. “Just consider the career that is open to you now. You shall go to the Bar, after you have taken your degree; and I trust, my dear Herbert, that you will take a good one. You shall be called to the Bar, and then your father shall get you some appointment—I have one promised for you already—then your father shall give up his seat in the House to you. You have talents, my dear Herbert, and I am sure that you will distinguish yourself in the House. Think of the honours that are open to you. In time, you may get a Peerage. And will you give up all this for your love of a silly girl?”

“Such a career is perfectly compatible with my love for one who, with all deference to you, mother, is not a silly girl. Miss Williams is highly talented and accomplished.”

“Well, well, my dear Herbert, I am willing to concede all that you say in her praise. I suppose that she must have some good quali-

ties ; but, nevertheless, it would be impossible for you to hope for success in life were you to marry her. Indeed, it would be madness for you to think of marrying at all for the next ten years. Then, again, consider how you will offend your father if you persevere in acting against his wishes. No, my dear boy, really this must not be."

"I cannot break off my engagement, mother. I think that it would break my heart; and I am sure that it would break Miss Williams', were I to do so."

"Oh ! no, my dear Herbert," said Mrs. Colner, cheerfully ; "hearts are made of tough materials. You would both of you soon get over it. Then, as for breaking it off, there will be no difficulty in doing that. Such things are done every day. Nobody will think the worse of you for it. You are an inexperienced boy ; and she is, doubtless, a romantic girl. You did not know your own minds. You will deserve credit rather than blame for breaking the engagement off."

"I do know my own mind, mother," answered Herbert, firmly. "I love her with all

the strength of my nature ; and I cannot break the engagement off."

" Believe me, dear Herbert, that you can. You will find many girls as love-worthy as she is, to reconcile you to this act. So you fell in love at Seaford ? Ah ! yes, I hear that it is a very quiet, dull sort of a place. That accounts for it all."

" I should have loved Miss Williams wherever I had met her, mother," said Herbert, warmly. " You think that mine is merely a transient love ; but it is not, mother. No, time can only strengthen it. If you knew Miss Williams, you would cease to wonder at my loving her—she is so good, so pure. Do not think unkindly of her ; do not ask me to give her up, for indeed I cannot do so."

" My dear Herbert, what you think love, is merely a youthful infatuation. Be a man, Herbert. For your own sake, and for the girl's, you must make up your mind to terminate this most imprudent engagement."

" I cannot do so, mother. All your objections have been raised before. Mr. Williams was reluctant that I should engage myself to

his daughter. He anticipated your opposition."

"Did he, indeed?" said Mrs. Colner. "Doubtless he knew how to play his game. What do you know of Mr. Williams? Tell me all about him."

"I do not know much about him," answered Colner, unwilling to divulge the knowledge that he had of that gentleman's history.

"Tell me, though, Herbert, do you know anything that is particularly to his credit? You said that he had had reverses. What were they?"

"He lost his money, mother—that was what I meant."

"But how did he do that? What were the circumstances?"

"Really, mother, I cannot be expected to know them. Beyond the fact of his being the girl's father, I do not know much about him; nor do I care to know."

Mrs. Colner shook her head. She was dissatisfied with her son's answer, and guessed rightly that he was concealing something from her. "Do you mean to tell me that you know nothing at all about him?" she asked.

"He has some expectations, I believe," replied her son. "He wished me to defer my engagement until these were realised. It was solely my doing, this engagement; Mr. Williams was opposed to it. He has behaved to me in the kindest manner. I can assure you, mother, that he is a perfect gentleman."

"And you do not know the nature of these expectations?"

"No, mother. Miss Williams has expectations, likewise. It is thought that she is the rightful heiress to the property of an uncle who died recently. But I do not care for this; I love her for herself alone."

"Tell me, Herbert; do you believe in these expectations?"

"I believe that Mr. Williams does."

"Ah! yes, of course," observed Mrs. Colner. "They were a bait to catch you, my dear boy."

"Indeed they were not, mother!" cried Herbert, indignantly. "I loved her before I knew anything about them."

"Well, my dear Herbert," answered his mother, rising, "I shall not argue the matter with you. You must think it over carefully,

and I have no doubt that, by to-morrow morning, you will see it in a different light."

"No, mother," replied Herbert, with determination; "to-morrow or twenty years hence I shall hold the same sentiments. It will grieve me deeply to do anything that will displease you and father; but, in this case, the happiness of my life—the happiness of her who loves me is at stake, and I must secure it."

"Do you mean to tell me," exclaimed Mrs. Colner, incredulously, "that you will act in direct opposition to your father's wish?—to my wish?"

Colner bowed to his mother, but made no reply.

"You must be mad!" she cried. "Your father would never forgive you! Be sensible, Herbert; think the matter over calmly, and you will see that your obstinacy must ruin all your prospects in life. I shall not say anything more to you now, for I feel that it would be useless for me to do so. Be reasonable, and you will see the folly of this absurd attachment."

"Thank you, mother!" said her son, bitterly.
"Consider, Herbert, that all your prospects

are at stake. Now I shall leave you, for I have many things to attend to ; by to-morrow morning you will, doubtless, be in a more rational frame of mind," and Mrs. Colner swept proudly out of the room.

For a long time her son remained in the study, plunged in bitter reflection. His interview with his parents had but strengthened his resolve. Come what might, should his father and mother disown him for his conduct, he would not—he could not waver in his love. Then in his mind, clear as had it been a reality, rose up the image of his beloved ; upon him seemed to smile her dark, lustrous eyes, with the look of a guardian angel. The vision faded away, and sterner forms usurped its place. With a passionate exclamation, Colner sprang from his chair. He seized his hat and left the house, nor did he return until long after the shades of night had fallen upon the land.

CHAPTER V.

THE ABDUCTION.

“WELL, my own sweet pet,” said Mr. Williams to his elder daughter, the morning after the conversation recorded in our last chapter, “and so you don’t care to come out with your father and Polly. Think what a fine day it is, my precious one; you had better take advantage of it.”

“Thank you, dear papa,” answered Lottie; “but please excuse me. I want to have a good practice this morning. I have been rather idle for the last few days.”

“Bless you for an industrious darling!” exclaimed her father, fondly. “Polly, my angel, I hope that you will take pattern from your sister.”

"Oh! yes, pa," cried Polly; "I'll be as industrious as a bee in a tar-tub, one of these days!"

"My own beloved," observed Mr. Williams, reprovingly, "admirably suggestive of industry as your simile is, I hardly think that it is suitable for the lips of a young lady. It is too forcible, my own. Say that it is your intention to be as industrious as a little bee, if you like, but omit mention of the tar-tub, my love."

"All right, pa," laughed Polly; "but you know that I haven't the same cause to be industrious that Lottie has."

"My precious pet," said her father, "I should be inclined to think that industry is even more necessary to you than to your sweet sister."

"I mean, pa," explained Polly, "that I haven't Lottie's reason for wishing to stay at home. You have something very particular to do, haven't you, ducky?"

"Yes, Polly dear," answered Lottie, smiling, and blushing slightly, "I particularly wish to practise."

"And is there nothing else that you particularly wish to do—eh, my little dear?" demanded Polly.

"Don't be absurd, Polly," said Lottie, without answering her sister's last question.

"What else does our darling wish to do?" asked Mr. Williams. "Enlighten me, Polly, my pet."

"Shall I tell pa, eh, ducky?" inquired Polly.

"Really, Polly, you are too bad," said Lottie, turning over her music; "you may tell papa what you like."

"Well, pa," began Polly, "you know that Lottie received a letter from Mr. Colner the other day—such a letter! It was forty pages long."

"Oh! Polly," remonstrated Lottie—in a tone of joyful remonstrance, though—"how you exaggerate!"

"Do I?" cried Polly. "Well, to be exact, the letter was only thirty-eight pages long. It would have been longer, but, as Mr. Colner explained at the end, he was obliged to leave off then, to catch the post. Lottie has done nothing but think about that letter ever since. When she is alone she reads it, and when she is with me she talks about it. She has read it over to me half-a-dozen times."

"Oh! Polly," exclaimed Lottie, shocked at this gross violation of sisterly confidence.

"Oh! Lottie," retorted Polly, mimicking her sister's tone, "you know that you have. Last night, in bed, she talked to me about it for two hours."

"My sweet darlings," remonstrated Mr. Williams, "that was wrong—that was very naughty indeed. You should not talk when you go to bye-bye—you should go to sleep at once—you should court that refreshing repose which alone can preserve the lovely bloom of health that at present graces your beautiful cheeks. And what did our darling Lottie say, my pet?"

"Shall I tell pa what you said, ducky?" asked Polly.

"You may tell papa what you like, dear," answered Lottie.

"Well, pa," said Polly, "she kept telling me about the beauties of this letter. She knows it by heart, long as it is.

"Isn't he noble?" she asked.

"Very noble indeed," I answered.

"Isn't he beautiful?" she inquired.

"Most beautiful," I said.

“ ‘ Doesn’t he love me ?’ she demanded.

“ ‘ That he does,’ I replied. And so she went on, asking me questions, until I went to sleep. She woke me up three times, to tell me how perfect he was ; but at last she had pity on my sleepiness, and let me slumber. Didn’t you, ducky ? ”

Lottie smiled happily, but made no answer.

“ Well, my darlings,” declared Mr. Williams, “ Mr. Colner is a fine young man, and, what is more, he is a perfect gentleman. I am not surprised at my precious Lottie’s loving him so deeply. But what has all this to do with going out ? ”

“ Don’t you see, you silly pa,” cried Polly, “ that, as soon as we go out, she will read this precious letter over again ? There will be uncommonly little practice done by her. She has the letter in her bosom now—here it is,” and Polly made a dart at her sister, and endeavoured to draw Colner’s letter from its shrine. Lottie with considerable difficulty defeated the attempt.

“ Polly, my love,” said Mr. Williams, “ you must not be so rough—you might hurt your

sweet sister. Now, my pet, come along out, and leave our darling Lottie to her own reflections. Good-bye, my precious one. Give your father a kiss. We shall not be more than an hour." And having embraced his daughter, Mr. Williams left the room, followed by Polly, after that young lady had kissed Lottie and begged her pardon for the revelations which she had made.

Left to herself, Lottie sat down to the piano, and resolutely began to practise a difficult sonata of Mozart's. For ten minutes or more she played as if her whole soul was in her task; but then her touch began to grow uncertain, and she made several mistakes without pausing to correct them. A discordant chord at last caused her to cease from playing. For several minutes she sat, gazing at the music, but her thoughts were far from the creation of Mozart's genius. She quitted the piano and seated herself in her father's easy-chair, and then from her bosom she drew her much-cherished letter. Of a verity, Colner would have been jealous of those senseless pages, had he seen the kisses that Lottie bestowed upon them. Then she be-

gan once more to peruse the loved epistle. Truly had her sister said that Lottie knew that epistle by heart; still did that loving heart glory in reading it, for ever in its perusal did Lottie find some fresh beauty to confirm her in her belief that the thoughts of her lover were with her, even as hers were with him.

There was a double knock at the outer door. The old charwoman had departed, and Lottie was alone in her father's apartments. A double knock!—who could it be? She hastily returned Colner's letter to its shrine, and then proceeded to admit the visitor, but not before a second knock had resounded through the apartments.

Lottie opened the door. Two gentlemen crossed the threshold. They were tall, dark men, dressed in black. The elder, from under whose long beard peeped out a white neck-tie, bowed to Lottie, and inquired, in an anxious tone of voice—

“ You are Miss Williams ?”

“ Yes,” answered Lottie, nervously, for her mind foreboded evil from the appearance of the two men.

“ I am the Reverend Mr. Smith,” continued

the bearded man. “Permit me to introduce Sir —,” mentioning a name honoured in the medical world. “I grieve to say that we are the bearers of evil tidings.”

Lottie’s cheek turned pale, her heart almost ceased to beat, as she gazed at the Reverend Mr. Smith in alarm. Of what could the evil tidings be?

“Your father and sister have met with an accident,” said the *soi-disant* clergyman. “They were crossing Oxford Street, when an omnibus came upon them suddenly and knocked them down. They have been taken to a house close by, and there they are now, I fear, in a very precarious state.”

“Oh! sir,” cried Lottie, trembling with agitation, “where are they? How shall I find them?—what shall I do?”

“I was passing at the time,” resumed the Reverend Mr. Smith, “and assisted to carry your father into the house. This gentleman—with whose fame as a doctor, you are, doubtless, acquainted—was passing, too, in his carriage. He has attended your father and sister, and now has placed his carriage at your service,

that you may lose no time in going to your relations."

"Oh! sir, I thank you most deeply! Will you come in for a few seconds? I shall lose no time in putting my things on," and having ushered them into the sitting-room, Lottie flew to attire herself.

"Now then, Fred," whispered the bearded man when they were alone, "where's the letter? Put it on the table."

Fred drew a letter from his pocket and placed it upon the table. He had hardly done so when Lottie returned, equipped for the expedition.

"I am ready!" she cried; "let us hasten to my father and sister. Let us lose no time!"

"Come, then, Miss Williams," said the pretended clergyman, opening the door. "Say nothing to the people of the house, for it is advisable that we should get your father and sister home as quietly as possible."

The three descended the stairs with precipitation. A plain brougham was waiting at the street-door, and a small crowd was standing by,

gazing at it. The man with the beard handed Lottie into the carriage.

“ You go on with the doctor, Miss Williams ; this brougham only holds two. I shall follow at once.”

The younger man sprang into the carriage ; the other slammed the door to, and made a sign to the coachman, who struck his horse smartly over the flank with his whip. The spirited animal darted off towards Oxford Street at a rapid pace.

The bearded man turned toward the group of gazers ; he singled out a respectable looking woman who was standing on the doorstep of the house wherein Mr. Williams dwelt. Smiling he addressed her.

“ A pretty pair, are they not, ma’am ?”

“ What, sir ?” asked the woman, in surprise.

“ I said that they make a good couple; do they not, ma’am ?” The bearded man smiled significantly.

“ Gracious me, sir !” exclaimed the woman, “ do you mean—?”

“ Precisely so,” assented the gentleman with the beard. “ It is a runaway match. Parents

were unwilling. They were forced to elope. They love each other so devotedly. Good morning, ma'am," and Mr. Ralph Coulter marched off, leaving the worthy woman in a state of utter bewilderment.

A group of neighbours and other people gathered round the woman to whom Mr. Ralph Coulter had made such a startling announcement. She was a lodger in the house wherein Mr. Williams dwelt. She was amazed, for she had learnt from the charwoman that Lottie was engaged to marry the handsome young gentleman who had been such a constant visitor to the house before Christmas. She had seen Colner many times, and knew that it was not with him that Lottie had gone off. What could it all mean? There was a mystery in the matter, and this she, with the assistance of her neighbours, endeavoured to solve.

In the midst of their discussion, Mr. Williams and Polly returned. The group about the door made way for him to pass, and Mr. Williams, raising his hat politely, entered the house. Burning with curiosity to discover the meaning of the affair that had caused her so much per-

plexity, the woman to whom Ralph Coulter had spoken confronted him in the hall, and said,

“If you please, sir, she’s gone.”

Mr. Williams paused and looked at her. There was an agitation in her manner that alarmed him.

“Gone, my good madam,” he exclaimed; “who is gone? What do you mean?”

“Miss Williams, sir,” exclaimed the woman. “She went away with a gentleman in a carriage about half an hour ago. Two gentlemen came for her, and she went off with one of them.”

“Went off!” cried Mr. Williams, in amazement. “Come upstairs, my dear Polly. Doubtless your sister has left some explanation of this strange behaviour. Thank you, madam. I know that my daughter was going out,” he added, not wishing the other inmates of the house to suppose that his daughter had done anything of which he could disapprove.

Mr. Williams hurried upstairs faster than he had ever done before. He thought it very strange that Lottie should have gone out in this manner, but he had not the least doubt that it was Colner with whom she had departed.

"This is very wrong of your sister, my love," he said to Polly, as he was fumbling at the key-hole. "It is very wrong of Mr. Colner too. He should not have done such a thing. I feel hurt by Mr. Colner's behaviour."

The door was opened, and Polly rushed by her father into the sitting-room. She saw a letter lying upon the table. She snatched it up and perused the address.

"There is a letter for you, pa, but I do not think that it is in Mr. Colner's handwriting. Read it;" and Polly handed it to her father, and peeped over his shoulder, anxious to ascertain the nature of the contents.

"Gracious Heaven!" cried her father, "what is this?—what can it mean?" He read in feverish haste. The letter bore the date of that day.

"DEAR SIR,

"I must crave your pardon for my behaviour. When you know all, you will forgive me and your daughter. We have long loved each other. Circumstances forbid the open declaration of our marriage. Shortly I shall declare it to the world. Until that time

suspend your judgment. I am rich, and of good family. My every effort shall have Lottie's happiness for its object. We shall be married privately this morning, and shall leave England at once. In two or three months I shall have the opportunity of presenting myself and my wife to you. Until then, with every assurance of my esteem and your daughter's love, farewell."

There was no signature to this strange epistle. It was blurred and blotted, as if its author had written it in haste.

"Oh! dear pa," cried Polly, gazing with frightened look into her father's face, "what can it mean?"

"Mean!" answered Mr. Williams, huskily—"yes, what can it mean? I am utterly bewildered."

"But, pa," exclaimed Polly, passionately, "it cannot be true. No, Lottie could never have done such a thing."

"Go and get that woman—the one who spoke to me. Be quick, my darling, be quick!"

Polly hurried off to find her; and Mr. Williams perused the letter again. He was at an

utter loss to form an opinion upon the statements contained in it.

"Here is Mrs. Brown, pa dear," said Polly, entering the room with the woman of whom she had been in quest.

"Mrs. Brown—ah! thank you, my dear. Take a seat, Mrs. Brown. Something has happened to annoy me very much, Mrs. Brown. May I depend upon your secrecy if I communicate the affair to you?"

Mrs. Brown protested that her nature was utterly incapable of betraying a secret confided to her.

"Then, Mrs. Brown," said Mr. Williams, "I want you to answer some questions. Who were they—I mean, what kind of men were they who came for my daughter?"

"Perfect gentlemen, sir," declared Mrs. Brown. "One was a clergyman—a fine-looking man, sir. He was tall, and had a long beard. The other—the one who went in the carriage with the young lady—he was a handsome man, too, sir. They seemed tip-top gentlemen, sir."

"And my daughter—did she say anything?"

"No, nothing, sir. She looked a little pale

and agitated-like ; and she got into the carriage very quick, and they went off very fast."

" What kind of a carriage was it ?"

" A small one, sir—only just big enough for two. It was painted dark green. The coachman he had dark green livery on. I tried to speak to him, but he took no notice of me—no, sir, no more than had I been a stone."

" Did you hear anything said ?"

" Not much, sir. The clergyman he handed the young lady into the carriage, and said to her, ' I shall follow at once.' Then they drove off, and the clergyman, he said to me, for I was there, looking on, for I had just come from market—leastwise, I had just come from market when the carriage come up to the house——"

" Yes, yes," said Mr. Williams, impatiently, " what did he say ?"

" He said, says he, speaking very civil-like, ' Do they not make a very pretty couple, ma'am ?' —he called me ma'am. Then said I, ' Lor', sir, is it that you mean that the young lady has run away with that gentleman ?' ' Yes,' says he, ' they were obliged to run away, for,'

says he, ‘he could not get permission to marry the young lady ; and,’ says he, ‘they have loved each other for many a year.’ With that, sir, he went off, and left me quite a-wondering, for I did think, sir, and so did Mrs. Robinson, the landlady, that the young lady was——”

“ Yes, yes,” interrupted Mr. Williams. “ And you have no further knowledge of what happened when I was out ?”

“ No, sir,” said Mrs. Brown ; “ but I do hope——”

“ Thank you, Mrs. Brown. I am indebted to you for your information. I may rely upon your secrecy, may I ? You will mention nothing of this to anybody ?”

“ Oh ! no, sir,” protested Mrs. Brown.

“ Thank you, Mrs. Brown. I feel much obliged to you. Good morning ; Polly, my love, show Mrs. Brown out.” And that worthy woman departed, to communicate, under pledge of the most inviolable secrecy, the particulars of her interview with Mr. Williams to Mrs. Robinson, and the other female inmates of the house.

“ Pa, dear,” said Polly, returning into the

room, and putting her arms round her father's neck, as he, plunged in thought, sat gazing vacantly at the letter, "what do you think? What can it all mean?"

"Mean, my own darling child!" exclaimed Mr. Williams, sadly—"I fear it means that your sister has deceived us."

"Oh! no, pa," cried Polly, the hot tears trinkling down her cheeks, "do not say that, dear. Lottie could never have deceived us—indeed, she never could have done it!"

"She deceived me once," said Mr. Williams, bitterly—"she never told me that she had made Mr. Colner's acquaintance at Seaford. It was her duty to have told me."

"Don't judge her by that, pa," begged Polly. "She did not know that Mr. Colner cared for her—he had never spoken to her about it. She thought that she should never see him again. She loved him, and was afraid to mention his name. Oh! do not judge her harshly!"

"Has she confided fully in you? Has she ever told you of her acquaintance with this man with whom she has gone off?" asked Mr. Williams, suspiciously.

"No," protested Polly. "But, pa, I am certain that Lottie would never have deceived us. It is some vile plot, pa—indeed Lottie could never have deceived us!"

Mr. Williams shook his head doubtfully.

"I cannot see how Lottie could have been carried off against her will," he said. "I am at a loss to account for her departure, supposing that it was against her will. Surely she might have left some explanation of the reasons that prompted her to go away thus."

"Let us go to Mrs. Martin, pa dear. She may be able to tell us something."

"True, my own darling—let us go to her. I should have thought of that before. Let us go at once. That villainous old woman will doubtless be able to give us some tidings of Lottie. Perhaps she can solve the mystery of the whole affair. Come, my sweet pet," and, hastily rising, Mr. Williams, accompanied by his daughter, hurried off to the house of Lottie's old friend.

CHAPTER VI.

A CRUSHING BLOW.

IT was a stormy interview that Herbert had with his father and mother on the morning following the day upon which he declared to them his engagement to Lottie. To all his father's threats, to all his mother's prayers and entreaties, he turned a deaf ear. Nothing could induce him to swerve from his allegiance to his love. At last, stung by the sneers and abuse of his father, who, in his vituperations, spared neither Herbert nor the object of his affections, the young man so far forgot the respect that he owed to his father, as to retort, in reply to Mr. Colner's assertion that his son was a fool and an idiot, and the lady of his love an abandoned hussy, that he was no more idiotic or foolish

than was the member for Stickborough himself. Mr. Colner fairly gasped with rage. Never had similar language been used to him. Then the flood-gates of his eloquence were opened, and he raved at his son in a manner that excited the pity and contempt of the young lover.

“Hark you, boy,” he said, when, after storming at his son for a quarter of an hour, he had lapsed into a state of comparative calm, “you have defied me—yes, by Heaven! you have chosen to defy me! You shall abide by the consequences—yes, begad! as you’ve made your bed, so shall you lie in it. I give you up—I shall have nothing more to do with you—I shall forbid your mother and brothers to own you. Do you hear me, madam? I forbid you to own him as son. You shall leave my house, you shall get out of it at once, or, by G—d! I’ll kick you out of it! Now, go!—get out of my sight! Let me never see your ungrateful face again! Don’t write to me, or I’ll burn your letters. Go at once, and when you’re starving, think of me!”

“Good-bye, sir,” said Herbert, sadly. “I beg your pardon for anything that I may have

said, inadvertently. Will you shake hands, sir, before I go?"

"Shake hands!" exclaimed Mr. Colner, recoiling from the extended hand; "no, begad! I shall never touch you again. Expect no help or pardon from me. Get out of my house, or, begad! I shall forget myself! Don't speak to him, madam. Let him go his own ungrateful way alone."

"You will not forbid my kissing my mother before I go away—for ever? Good-bye, mother, and God bless you!"

Herbert kissed his mother, and quitted his father's study. His mother followed him to the hall.

"My dearest boy," she said, "how could you be so mad? Your father is furious against you. Goodness knows how I am to make him forgive you! You must go to London for a time. Go to our hotel, and I shall write to you to-morrow. You had better go at once. I shall order the dog-cart to take your things to the station. Do not be long, and you can catch the mid-day express."

It took Herbert but a short time to pack up

his portmanteau. His mother came to him as he was engaged in packing it.

"Here, Herbert," she said, "is money for you—I suppose that you have not much. I dare not stay with you now, for your father has forbidden me to speak to you. Good-bye, my dearest boy. Let me implore you to break off this imprudent affair; do that, and all will be well." Mrs. Colner kissed her son passionately, and left his room in tears.

It was no pleasant journey that Colner had to London that day, although the train was bearing him to the city wherein dwelt his beloved. His father had disowned him! Whether he should ever again be taken into favour, whether he might hope for ultimate forgiveness, was matter of grave misgiving to our hero, who knew full well how stubborn his father could, upon occasion, be. Supposing that his father persevered in his determination to disown him, what then? Should he be condemning Lottie to a life of poverty? The pleasant picture which Mr. Williams had drawn of the horrors attendant upon poverty occurred to his mind, and he shuddered. What could he

do to earn a living? But little, he feared. Of course his career at Oxford would be cut short. There was the boat-club—but the prospects of that institution were of trifling consideration to him now. But he didn't care—that was the ultimate conclusion to which he came; no, come what might, he should be rich in the possession of Lottie's love. He had given his all for a pearl of great price, and the cost of the jewel was but small in comparison with its true value.

By the time that he arrived in Greek Street, Colner's love for Lottie had reconciled him to the wrath of his father, and all subsequent evils that might therefrom result. He thought not of his father then, for all his thoughts were with the beloved one, whom he fondly hoped in a few minutes to clasp to his heart. It was five o'clock in the afternoon when he reached the house. There was no light upon the broad staircase, save that of the street-lamp, which shone through the cracked windows, but the darkness was no impediment to Colner's rapid progress up the ancient staircase. Soon he found himself upon Mr. Williams' landing, and

hastily he knocked at the door. The echoes evoked by the little brass knocker died away ; no sound from within Mr. Williams' partition came in response. Again Colner knocked ; again through the silence which followed he listened anxiously for sign to denote that he was heard. Was nobody in ? A third time he knocked. This time a response came to his appeal, but not from the quarter whence he expected it. A woman, with a rushlight candle in her hand, descended the stairs, and, leaning over the banisters, cried,

“Is that anyone as wants Mr. Williams ?”

“Yes,” answered Colner ; “is he in ?”

“No ; he’s out,” said the woman.

“Do you know how long he’ll be ?”

The woman came downstairs to Mr. Williams’ landing, and, shading the candle with her hand, peered at Colner. She recognised him at once.

“I’m Mrs. Robinson, sir—the landlady of this house, sir,” she informed Colner. “I expect Mr. Williams back soon, for he left no message, and there ain’t no ticket on his door to say when he’ll be in.”

" You don't know where he has gone, I suppose ?" asked Colner.

The woman hesitated and replied, " No, not exactly, sir."

" Where do you think that he is ?" inquired the lover.

" Well, sir, I think as how he has gone to try to find out something about the young lady."

" What young lady ?—which young lady ?" asked Colner, anxiously.

" The eldest young lady, sir," answered Mrs. Robinson.

" What of her ?" demanded Colner, in breathless agitation. " Is she ill ?—where is she ?—tell me."

" No, sir," said the woman, " she ain't ill."

" What has happened, then ?" cried Colner. " Has she met with an accident ? Cannot you tell me, woman ?"

Mrs. Robinson was a kind-hearted soul, and knowing that Colner was engaged to Lottie, was fully aware of the pain that she must cause him were she to apprise him of the supposed elopement of his *fiancée*. Colner's exclamation had shown her that he was ignorant of it. She

therefore hesitated, and to Colner's passionate questions, made answer that Mr. Williams would return soon, and then he would give the gentleman information on the subject. This evasion half maddened the lover, who, from her manner, was convinced that some horrible mishap had befallen his beloved.

"Why do you not answer me?" he cried. "Something has happened—what is it? Tell me at once."

Mrs. Robinson would have given much to have been elsewhere at that moment. Again she tried to escape from imparting knowledge of the elopement to the young man.

"I think as how the young lady is quite well, sir," she said. "But Mr. Williams will be in soon, sir."

Colner seized her by the wrist. "Tell me at once," he exclaimed, "what has happened?"

Sorely against her will, Mrs. Robinson answered—

"The young lady went away this morning, sir."

Colner dropped her wrist; he had expected to hear that some terrible accident had befallen

Lottie. How absurd he had been ! He forced a laugh, and said to the landlady,

“ You alarmed me. Why did you not tell me this at once ? So Miss Williams went away this morning ? Do you know if she has gone to her friend, Mrs. Martin’s ?”

Right glad to see a means of escape from her painful position, Mrs. Robinson told a falsehood and said,

“ Yes, sir, I think that she has gone there.”

“ Ah !” replied Colner, “ I shall go there—but no ; perhaps Miss Williams will return here to-night. Do you know if she will ?”

“ I think so, sir,” said the landlady. “ I expect Mr. Williams in every minute, sir. Will you excuse me ? I have my irons down, sir, and I must go to see after them.”

“ Yes, certainly,” answered Colner. “ I cannot get in here, so I shall go out and walk up and down until Mr. Williams returns. Thank you, Mrs. Robinson ;” and Colner descended the stairs, and went out into the street.

As he walked up and down before the house, gradually his mind again began to conceive a suspicion that something must have happened

to his beloved. He recalled the agitated manner in which the landlady had answered his questions. What could have been the cause of her agitation? Lottie was well; she had met with no accident; upon that score he had no ground for uneasiness. Why, however, had she gone away? Would she return to Greek Street that evening? How foolish it was of him not to have found out more from the landlady! What on earth could have occurred?—for it seemed clear enough to him that something of importance had happened to Lottie. Perhaps Mr. Williams had discovered the second will. That seemed probable. Still, why should that have caused the landlady agitation? A thousand thoughts suggested themselves to the mind of the lover as he paced quickly up and down the street, but not one of them breathed the slightest doubt as to the truth of his beloved. It was utterly impossible for him to associate his darling with any suspicion of evil. What could have happened? As the minutes wore on, the uneasiness of Colner increased. Why should he not take a cab, and seek the presence of his beloved one at once? That

clearly was the best course to pursue ; he would go to Mrs. Martin's. Inspired with this determination, he turned his face towards Oxford Street, and walked rapidly in that direction. He was turning the corner of Soho Square, when suddenly he came upon Mr. Williams and Polly. The father and daughter started back as he encountered them. Polly's cheek turned pale, that of Mr. Williams a burning red.

“ How are you, my dear Mr. Williams ? ” cried Colner. “ How is Polly, too ? I have been to your place, and finding that you were not at home, was just going off to Mrs. Martin's. Lottie is there, is she not ? ”

What could Mr. Williams say ? He stammered out a reply that Lottie was not with Mrs. Martin. Colner's apprehensions again took alarm.

“ Where is she, then ? ” he cried ; and then noticing Mr. Williams' strange manner, he asked in terror what had happened.

“ Come home,” said Mr. Williams, in a hoarse whisper. “ Come to my rooms, and I shall tell you all.”

“ Tell me now ! ” exclaimed Colner ; “ for

heaven's sake, tell me what has happened!
Where is Lottie?"

"No," answered Mr. Williams, firmly, "not here, I cannot tell you here;" and he walked on quickly, lending a deaf ear to Colner's prayers that he would inform him of what had chanced. Colner essayed to get an answer from Polly, but the poor child burst into tears, and walked on, sobbing as if her heart would break. By the time that the three arrived in Mr. Williams' chambers, Colner was half frantic with fear. Mr. Williams lighted the candles, and then he turned round and faced Colner.

"Are you a brave man, Mr. Colner?" he asked. "Can you bear bad news? I am about to tell you what will shock you."

"I can bear anything," cried Colner. "Is Lottie dead?"

"No," answered Mr. Williams. "I have worse news for you. She has eloped with some man this morning."

Colner staggered to a chair. His heart must have ceased to beat, for an icy shock quivered through him, and he reeled into the seat, incapable of standing. He gasped for breath, and

with eyes starting from their sockets, gazed wildly into Mr. Williams' face.

Then in slow tones Mr. Williams proceeded to relate to the young man the events of that day. With stern impartiality he summed up the evidence against his daughter, and pronounced judgment against her. In his opinion she had been guilty of the blackest deceit and perfidy. Nor had he alone come to this conclusion. He had sought the advice of certain police authorities, men whose sagacity was a by-word in the metropolis; and they, after careful consideration of the case, had unanimously declared that Miss Williams must have been a consenting party to the elopement. Further evidence was adduced to condemn Lottie. By the train which ran in connection with the tidal boat from Folkestone, that day, had travelled a lady and gentleman, whose appearance in every way corresponded with that of Lottie and the partner of her flight. They had taken tickets for Paris. Right cleverly, in the opinion of the detectives, had the plans of the runaways been laid; the detectives, for their part, had no doubt in the case. Mr. Williams had been to Mrs.

Martin, and the old lady, who was inexpressibly shocked by his news, had disclaimed all knowledge of Lottie's acquaintance with any one answering the description of him with whom Lottie had gone off. She was loud in the expression of her belief that Lottie was incapable of acting in so treacherous a manner. Had Mrs. Martin been less bewildered by the news of Lottie's departure, she might have remembered the visit paid to her, some two months before, by a certain gentleman who introduced himself to her as Mr. John Smith, and who evinced the greatest desire to ascertain the whereabouts of Mr. Serrall and his family. Mrs. Martin had not mentioned that visit to Mr. Williams. She had been unwell, and had delayed doing so until the circumstance had almost escaped her memory. Had Mr. Williams been informed of that visit, his inquiries might have elicited the fact that the visitor was one of the sons of Mrs. Coulter, and he would at once have suspected the existence of a plot against his daughter. As it was, no suspicion that the Coulters were involved in the case crossed his mind; for he supposed that they were not only ignorant of his

existence, but that they had no knowledge that daughters had been born to him. From Mrs. Martin's he went to Scotland Yard, where he obtained the services of a detective, with whom he visited the different railway termini, in the hope of finding out some news of his daughter. The discovery that two travellers, one of whom answered the description of his daughter, had started together for Paris, seemed conclusive proof that he was right in his suspicion that Lottie had left her home voluntarily. Mr. Williams was a man who had had a terrible insight into the wickedness of human nature; few men knew better than he of what depravity the mind of mortal is capable. One less versed in the mysteries of life might have deemed it impossible that Lottie could have been guilty of such base treachery towards her father and her lover, but Mr. Williams had known how black ingratitude can be, and he recognised the possibility of his daughter's having committed such a crime. The arguments of the detectives were based upon an estimate of human morality no less unfavourable to natural virtue than was his own. Many such a case had

come under the notice of the police authorities. Mr. Williams listened to their reasoning, and from its coincidence with his own judgment, he persuaded himself that the flight of his daughter was, beyond all doubt, a matter of her own doing.

Colner sat gazing wildly at Mr. Williams, as the latter unfolded the events of the day. He did not speak, for the sickening effects of the great shock which he had sustained rendered him incapable of speech. Mr. Williams was alarmed at the young man's appearance; he had, like a good surgeon, used the knife freely; could the patient recover from the wound caused by the healing steel? Polly's heart bled for the anguish that she knew Colner must be suffering. She approached him, and putting one hand upon his shoulder, timidly, she said to him,

“Do not give way, Mr. Colner; do not believe that Lottie can have done this. She cannot have done it; no, I am sure that she never could have done such a thing.”

Colner looked vacantly at her; he turned his gaze once more upon Mr. Williams. That gentleman shook his head sadly, in answer to the beseeching glance.

"It's a shame, pa!" cried Polly, her wet eyes flashing with indignation, "it is a wicked shame to accuse Lottie of this. She could no more have been so wicked than I myself could; no, not so much, and I myself never could have done such a thing. Didn't she love Mr. Colner? Yes, she did, with all her heart and soul. Didn't she love you and me? You know that she did. It's a shame, it's a"—here Polly's tears mastered her angry eloquence.

Colner rose to his feet—he moved towards the door.

"Where are you going, Mr. Colner?" asked Mr. Williams, seizing the young man's arm.

"Let me go," murmured Colner. "Lottie is false to me. Let me get out—I must have air!" and he shook off Mr. Williams' grasp, and rushed from the room.

"Poor fellow!" sighed Mr. Williams. "Polly, my love, I must go after him. I do not like his looks—he may do something desperate."

"Oh, pa," cried Polly, "don't go!—don't leave me alone! Something might happen to me. May I go with you?"

"Yes, my darling, but be quick."

Polly hastily resumed her hat and jacket, which she had taken off, and, with her father, proceeded after Colner. That young gentleman had been seen to depart in the direction of Leicester Square, but all Mr. Williams' attempts to overtake him were futile. After an hour spent in fruitless search, Mr. Williams and his daughter returned sadly to their cheerless abode.

CHAPTER VII.

LOVE-MAD.

THE rain was falling fast as Colner rushed wildly from the house. It was a stormy evening, and but few pedestrians were abroad. Colner recked not of the failing rain, he felt not the bitterness of the chilly blast that hissed past him. He walked on ; quickly, madly, blindly he rushed onwards. Sense and thought had deserted him, and onwards he strode, as had he been in a dream. More quickly still he strode along, not caring, not knowing whither he was going. His brain was, as it were, in a trance, inert, incapable of sensation or reflection. Then he did not feel unhappy, for all sense and thought had abandoned him, and he could not realize what had happened. All his mental

faculties were crushed into numbness by the fearful shock that he had sustained. Lottie was false to him ; this one idea obliterated all others. The hours wore on, and still strode he senseless onwards. His brain was whirling, and in his mind there rang, as if shrieked out by a legion of fiends, his one thought, "Lottie is false to me!" One all-pervading idea thundered in his brain and deadened his reason.

A man hastening in the opposite direction, his umbrella held before him to ward off the pelting rain, stumbled against Colner and roused him from his trance. Colner looked around him. He had left London behind him, and was proceeding along a broad high-road, lighted at long intervals by flickering lamps. On one side of the road were a few detached houses, of the suburban-villa order. Where was he ? Whither was he going ? He cared not. So onwards again he rushed.

And now he tried to reflect upon all that had happened, but his mind was far too excited to permit of calm reflection. Gradually the stupefying effects of the bitter blow wore off, and his heart became filled with rage and madness.

Too clearly he saw how he had been deceived—deceived by the lying words of a false-hearted girl. She had never cared for him ; her vow of love had been a perjury. Oh ! how he had been beguiled and despised ! She must have despised him, or she never could have dared to trample thus upon the love that she had created and encouraged. And he—that man—the partner of her flight, the treacherous, accursed villain who had robbed him of what he valued more than life—oh ! thank God, he could find him out and be revenged upon him. Bitterly should he repent of his villainous perfidy. Could Lottie really love him ? Colner prayed that she might, for then she would experience at his destruction a tithe of the agony which he himself was enduring ; her prospects would be blasted as his own. Revenge and hate goaded the steps of the young man to quicker pace.

The rain ceased, the wind moaned more faintly, and from behind a murky cloud flashed out in its glory of fulness the silver moon. So softly shone the moon, that as Colner gazed upon it, the power of its tranquillity seemed to pervade him, and with the influence of its holy

calmness came thoughts not of revenge. Insensibly into the sadness of an overwhelming grief melted the promptings of madness. He had been wronged, bitterly wronged, but should he benefit himself by injuring Lottie? And that other with whom she had fled—had he known of Colner's love for Lottie?

Probably he was ignorant of it—no, it was Lottie alone who had deceived him. She could never have known the intensity of his love; had she done so, she never could have rejected it. He must tear his idol from his breast; he must crush it, even though the effort killed him. Killed him! what had he to live for now? For what happiness in life could he venture to hope? All his hopes for the future, all his dreams of happiness, were dissipated, to return in this world never again.

A church clock striking the hour attracted the attention of the wretched one, and recalled his thoughts to his present position. He walked on, shivering with the cold that hitherto he had not felt. Where was he? He was passing down a long, straggling street, from the houses of which gleamed but few lights. Soon he pass-

ed a house before which swung a sign-board—through the red window-curtains shone a ruddy glare. It was an inn. Colner entered the house, and having ordered a glass of brandy-and-water, inquired the name of that village or town. It was Hounslow. The landlord ushered Colner into a little parlour, in which were no other guests, and having stirred the fire, asked him if it was his intention to go up to London by the last train. Colner replied in the affirmative. The host informed him that he had an hour to wait before the train was due, and then withdrew from the room.

Left to himself, Colner endeavoured to consider his future movements. He must try to forget Lottie—yes, he must strive to banish her from his mind ; he must tear her from his heart. He took from his breast-pocket a small silken pocket-book, that contained what he had, but a few hours before, deemed his greatest treasures. Almost illegible now was the letter which Lottie had written to him ; soiled, too, was the *carte* which depicted her as she was ere falsehood had stained her, for the silken pocket-book had been soaked through

and through by the pelting rain. There was a little lock of hair, too. How well did Colner remember the morning that it came into his possession—that morning when first he told his darling of his love! How happy had that morning made him!—and now——! Colner stirred the fire fiercely, and the hungry flames blazed up. On to the blaze he cast letter, *carte*, and hair, and then he watched them burn. Yes, he watched them burn, although the flames which curled round them seemed to creep round his heart. He watched those dark eyes—oh! how sad they seemed!—smoulder, burst into flame, vanish, and fade away into ashes. He watched until the last particle had been consumed, and with it seemed to perish the only link which connected him with a happiness for ever departed.

He rose and quitted the house, and made his way to the railway-station. It wanted yet three quarters of an hour to the departure of the train for London. He walked out upon the platform, and sitting down upon a truck, gave himself up to the agony of his meditations.

Let preachers rave of the tortures of hell's

fire—of the burning agony ever eating into the ever-living flesh of the damned. Fools! little do they know what mental sufferings are ; little do they reck of the soul's anguish, which rends and consumes the brains of those whom their Maker has abandoned to despair, until they would fain flee to physical suffering, as to a sure relief! What agony could death have in comparison with his ?

Death, breathing a sweet calm !—its inspiration took possession of his soul. Why should he live on, without aim or hope?—why suffer as he was suffering, when the exertion of one little moment might lull him into a repose for ever? It would be so easy for him to die. A passing train, a slight effort required to cast himself under its wheels, and in a few seconds the oblivion of eternity would be his. Yes, why should he not die?

Far away in the distance, the faint sound of an approaching train seemed to announce to him that Heaven was pitying his sufferings, and sending to him a deliverer. Should he not seize upon the chance thus offered him of ending all his sufferings? Was he afraid to die?

Afraid!—of what? The possible damnation of his soul in some future world? Could that be worse than the agony that he was enduring? But who has presumed to determine the soul's future condition? The fanaticism of religion has, indeed, declared the soul to be immortal in its immateriality, but what of that? Does not reason demonstrate the impossibility of sensation without the agency of the organs of sense? The destruction of the body must preclude the soul from life and action, from thought and pain. He had naught to fear from death. Thus reasoned he in his anguish.

And now a long luggage-train appeared in sight, dragging its sinuous length round a distant curve of the line. His mind was determined—he must die. How slowly did the train seem to creep along! Hasten, hasten faster, oh! angel of death, to thy suppliant! Why must his sufferings be so long protracted? There are eyes that will weep, hearts that will mourn for him. Oh! hasten to him, before, thinking of these, he becomes unmanned, and fails to secure eternal rest.

Onwards came the mighty train, panting

with its exertions to reach him; now but a hundred yards intervened between him and his deliverer. His heart beat more quickly, but not with the pulsation of fear or doubt. Nearer, nearer still it came! The moment for freedom had now arrived. He rose from the truck upon which he had been sitting, with every muscle braced and firm for the perpetration of his design. The train was now but a few yards from him. He prepared to throw himself upon the line. Suddenly a hand was laid upon his shoulder; turning round, he saw the smiling face of Haller. His head seemed bursting—every object swam in the film that was spread before his eyes—a roaring as of cataracts stunned his ears, and God, in his mercy, deprived him of consciousness.

CHAPTER VIII.

ENSNARED.

THE carriage which Lottie supposed was conveying her to her father and sister proceeded rapidly across Oxford Street, and up one of the minor streets leading from that great thoroughfare. Several times did Lottie essay to obtain particulars of the accident that had befallen her relations; but her companion replied evasively, and begged her not to distress herself. This advice was but a poor consolation to the afflicted girl, who, from the anxiety that was evident in her companion's manner, felt convinced that the accident was of a terrible nature. What if she should find her father and sister dead? That was a horrible thought, and one which well-nigh over-

powered the poor girl's mind. She struggled bravely with her fears, and sought relief in fervent prayer that those who were so dear to her might be spared. Fred Coulter's mind was but ill at rest. Hitherto the plot had succeeded—its success had surpassed his hopes; but what if it failed? He knew the danger to which failure must expose him; and he trembled at the risk that he was running.

The carriage stopped before a mean-looking little house, in a narrow street, and Fred Coulter, alighting, assisted Lottie out of the brougham. Heaven had vouchsafed consolation to Lottie, and her countenance declared that she was nerved to meet the worst. There was a look of resolution in her eyes that alarmed her companion. As he knocked at the door, he said to her,

“ You seem agitated and nervous, Miss Williams. It is necessary that you should betray no nervousness now.”

“ No,” answered Lottie, “ I am not nervous—indeed, I am very brave—I can bear the worst.”

“ You must have a glass of wine to sustain

your courage—as a doctor, I must insist upon it."

The door was opened by Mrs. Coulter. Her face was very pale, and she trembled as she admitted Lottie and the pseudo-doctor into the house. Lottie noticed the agitation of Mrs. Coulter, and her fears attributed it to the worst cause. She addressed the trembling woman.

"How are they?—my father and sister?" she cried. "Are they still alive? Tell me, I implore you!"

"Be calm, Miss Williams, be calm," said Fred Coulter. "Mrs. Jones," he continued, addressing his mother, "will you give Miss Williams a glass of wine before she sees her relations."

"Oh! no, I require no wine," protested Lottie. "I am so brave—yes, so brave. Let me go to them at once."

"I must insist upon it, Miss Williams. Come into the parlour. Ah! here is some sherry—that will do. There, Miss Williams, drink that glass of wine. Let me see you drink it. That is right. Now you must remain here with Mrs. Jones for a few minutes, whilst I go to see our patients."

"May I not go with you?" implored Lottie.
"Do let me go with you? I can bear anything."

"No, Miss Williams, I must see them first," answered Fred Coulter, gravely. "I shall return and take you to them immediately. Have courage, Miss Williams." And he left the room.

Lottie turned towards Mrs. Coulter, who was standing near the window, with face averted from the young girl.

"Tell me, madam," she said beseechingly, "is there any hope? Does the doctor think that they will die? Tell me the worst—do not be afraid—I can bear it."

Mrs. Coulter replied without looking at Lottie,

"No, they will not die—there is hope for them,"

Strangely and harshly sounded these words, which Mrs. Coulter uttered almost in a whisper. To Lottie there seemed to be something in the tone of voice which belied the hope that the words held out to her.

"You are not deceiving me?" she asked.

“Oh! do not deceive me. Is there indeed hope that they may recover?”

“There is,” answered Mrs. Coulter, turning round and facing her questioner.

“Ah! thank Heaven for that,” murmured Lottie, in tone of earnest thankfulness; and again her pure soul ascended in fervent prayer to the throne of her Maker.

And now the powerful opiate that she had taken began to manifest its effects. A numbness seemed to steal over her. Her strength seemed to desert her. In alarm she cried,

“I am ill—I fear that I am ill. My eyes seem to swim, and I feel dizzy. Oh! what can it be?”

Mrs. Coulter threw her arm round Lottie’s waist, and prevented her from falling. She supported her to a sofa, and gently laid her upon it. Lottie made an ineffectual attempt to rise; she endeavoured to speak, but strength and speech failed her. Her head fell listlessly upon the sofa-cushion. In a few seconds she lay motionless upon the couch.

Ghastlier than ever was the look upon Mrs. Coulter’s face, as she tottered to the door and

opened it. Her younger son was standing in the hall.

"You may come in," she whispered to him.

Fred Coulter entered the room. He looked anxiously at the senseless girl. He knelt by her side, and felt her pulse. There was but a faint flutter in Lottie's vein to denote the presence of life. He was kneeling by the sofa when his brother came into the room.

"All is right, I suppose," said Ralph, softly. "Yes, the opiate seems to have done its work well," he added, gazing at the slumbering girl. "Now then, Fred, we must get her away soon. Let us carry her to the carriage."

"Is she alive?" asked Mrs. Coulter, nervously.

"Yes, mother," answered Fred; "you can hear her heart beat. Don't be afraid, Mater. The worst part of the business is over, and the rest is a very simple matter."

"You have behaved nobly, Mater," declared Ralph, attempting to kiss his mother.

She recoiled from the proffered embrace. Her son's brow knit itself into a frown.

"Now, Fred," he exclaimed, "we have no time to lose. We can only depend upon that stuff for three hours. We must get her down to Feltham at once."

"Very well," replied Fred, "I am ready. I shall go down with her in the carriage, and you and the Mater can go on ahead by rail, and see that all is ready."

"That will be unwise," objected Ralph; "I had better go on with her in the carriage. It will divert any suspicion from you, should anybody have noticed you bringing her here. You and the Mater may go by rail."

"No, I object to that," said Fred, suspiciously.

"Well, then," suggested Ralph, "the Mater had better take her down. That will be the best plan."

Rather against his will, Fred consented to this, and the two brothers carried the sleeping girl to the carriage. Their mother, after a futile attempt to decline the responsibility which they sought to impose upon her, consented to accompany Lottie to Feltham, and, getting into the brougham, pulled down the

blinds, and was whirled off with her charge to their destination.

When Lottie recovered her consciousness, she found herself lying upon a sofa, in a small, plainly-furnished, low-ceilinged room. Where could she be? She started up and gazed around her. The apartment was a strange one. She staggered to the window, which was heavily barred, and gazed out. A dreary prospect it was that met her eyes. The window looked upon a large, high-walled garden, which had evidently for a long time been uncultivated. Grass and weeds covered the broad walks, and the ground was strewn with timber, bricks, and rubbish. A few tall fruit-trees were waving their straggling branches in the wind that howled round the house, and the rain, falling heavily, perfected the desolation of the scene. Lottie leaned against the window, and strove to collect her thoughts. She felt very ill and giddy from the effects of the opiate, nor could she at first recall the events of the morning.

She was gazing out of the window, when Mrs. Coulter, who had quitted the room for awhile, returned. At the sight of her, Lottie's

memory came back. The accident that had befallen her father and sister, her visit to the house in which she thought they were, and her strange illness, flashed across her mind. Her apprehensions for the safety of those dear ones banished all thought of her own suffering, and she rushed towards Mrs. Coulter, as that lady entered the room.

"My father and sister!" she cried—"what of them? How are they? Take me to them."

"They are better," answered Mrs. Coulter. "They have gone away. And you, my child, how do you feel now?"

"Are they really better?" asked Lottie eagerly. "You are not deceiving me? Are they well?"

"They are quite well," replied Mrs. Coulter. "Their accident was a very slight one. You have been ill; you fainted. Are you better now?"

"Yes, I am better, thank you. Will you take me to my father and sister? I am quite well again."

"I cannot take you to them now," said Mrs.

Coulter, hesitatingly. "They have gone away, and they wish you to remain with me for some time."

"Gone away!" cried Lottie, in accents of distress. "But they are ill; they must still be suffering. I thank you very much for your goodness to them and to me, but please permit me to return to them at once."

"They wish you to stay here for a time," said Mrs Coulter. "You are still an invalid; you are not strong enough to go home, my child. You shall stay here for a few days, and I shall take care of you."

"I am very strong," urged Lottie; "indeed I am. I can walk home by myself; it is not far."

"My dear child," answered Mrs. Coulter, "you do not know how ill you have been. I have brought you down to the country. You are many miles from London."

A cry of surprise and sorrow burst from Lottie's lips.

"Did they send me away when I was ill?" she asked. "Oh! madam, have you told me the truth? Are they well, or are you seeking to

conceal something from me ? I implore you to tell me all !”

Mrs. Coulter’s heart well-nigh failed her at the beseeching look which accompanied Lottie’s words.

“Pray do not alarm yourself,” she said. “I have told you the truth. Your father and sister are well. They are in London.”

“Then let me go to them,” begged Lottie. “I cannot be happy away from them, when they are suffering, as they must be. Let me go to them at once !”

“Be calm, my child,” said Mrs. Coulter soothingly ; “it is impossible that you can return to them to-day.”

“Why is it impossible ?” demanded Lottie, anxiously.

“Do not seek for reasons,” replied Mrs. Coulter. “Make up your mind to stay with me for a few days. I shall take great care of you, and shall make you very happy.”

“I cannot stay with you !” cried Lottie. “I beg of you to permit me to return to them. Suffer me to do so.”

“I cannot,” said Mrs. Coulter.

"You cannot!" exclaimed Lottie. "I will return to them. You shall not keep me from them."

"For a few days, my child," urged Mrs. Coulter.

"No," declared Lottie, "I shall return to them at once."

"Consider, my child, that it is their wish that you should remain with me," said Mrs. Coulter.

"It cannot be their wish; they could not be so cruel!" exclaimed Lottie, pressing her hands to her throbbing brow. Poor girl, she had but one thought, but one wish, just then—it was to be with her father and sister, who were suffering. Why should they have sent her away? Doubtless it was to spare her the pain of witnessing their sufferings. But this must not be; her place was by the side of her father and sister. She must go to them. "No, madam," she cried, in answer to Mrs. Coulter's reiterated invitation, "I feel grateful to you for your goodness, but I must return to them at once. Do not attempt to prevent me;" and Lottie laid her hand upon Mrs. Coulter's arm, and looked imploringly into her face. Mrs. Coulter could not

meet her gaze ; she withdrew her arm from the young girl's touch.

"Remain here for a minute," she said, in a broken voice. "I shall send somebody to you;" and with these words she quitted the room.

Lottie looked round the apartment. Upon a chair she saw her jacket and hat. With trembling hands, she hastily put them on, and then she stood by the window, impatiently awaiting the coming of the person whom Mrs. Coulter was about to send to her. Soon she heard footsteps outside the door ; there was a muttered conversation, the purport of which she could not catch, and then the door opened, and Fred Coulter entered the room. Lottie recognised him as the doctor whom she had accompanied from Greek Street that morning. There was an evident embarrassment in the young man's manner as he advanced to meet Lottie. A burning blush of shame at the villainous part that he was about to play dyed his face. He bowed low to hide his agitation, and addressed the young girl in accents which betrayed the nervousness he felt.

"Mrs. Jones tells me that you feel very an-

xious about your relatives ; let me dissipate any fears that you have, by telling you that they have recovered from the effects of their accident. Pray set your mind at rest upon that point."

"Thank you, sir," answered Lottie. "I cannot thank you sufficiently for your kindness to them. It is my wish to return to them at once. I cannot stay here, away from them."

"There is no need that you should return to them," said the young man. "They will get on very well without you."

"But I ought to return to them," urged Lottie. "They must be suffering—yes, I must return to them at once."

Fred Coulter felt extremely uncomfortable. He was not sufficiently hardened in villainy for the part that he had undertaken to play. But there was no retreat for him now. He had committed himself to a course of action in which failure would involve him in utter ruin. He must nerve himself to carry out his scheme. His heart beat quickly as he drew forward two chairs, and begged Lottie to seat herself.

"I must explain matters to you, Miss Wil-

liams ; but pray sit down first," he said, as Lottie declined the proffered chair. She sat down, and the young man seated himself in front of her.

" You love your father and sister very dearly," he began.

" I do," replied Lottie, earnestly.

" Happy father and sister," continued Fred Coulter—" beyond a doubt they return your love; but has it never struck you, Miss Williams, that there is a love in comparison with which the love of relations is but a mere trifle ?"

Lottie thought of Colner, and blushed deeply. She wondered what her companion could mean by his question, but she made no answer to it. Fred Coulter saw the blush, and was at no loss to account for its cause, knowing as he did that Lottie was engaged to Colner. He paused for a few seconds, and then resumed in a deep, earnest tone of voice :

" Yes, Miss Williams, there is a love that transcends all others—a love that makes its possessor a slave to the object whom he loves. A man who loves a girl as I mean, lives only for that girl. He only lives to make her happy,

and his love is so intense that he must succeed in making her happy, even supposing that she does not at first feel a corresponding affection for him. Do you agree with me?"

Lottie bowed her head slightly. She thought that her father must have told the doctor of Colner's love for her.

"Many men fancy that they are inspired with love like this. In most cases they make a mistake. Such love is rare. All men who, as we are accustomed to put it, make love to a girl, try to persuade the girl that they are the victims of a passion similar to that which I have described. They think that all is fair in love and in war, and, with that pitiful idea, they do not hesitate to tell the unfortunate girl whose affections they are anxious to gain, whatever their object in gaining them may be, any falsehoods that may forward their designs upon her. It is a sad state of things that, especially for the girl, is it not, Miss Williams?"

Again Lottie bowed her head in assent. What a curious man the doctor was to talk to her thus! Thank goodness, what he said could never apply to Colner.

"Yes, it is very sad indeed, my dear Miss Williams," continued the young man, shaking his head, mournfully. "I have known the case of a man who sought to marry a girl for her money. The falsehoods that he told the unfortunate creature would shock you, were I to repeat them. Suffice it to say that he induced her to believe that he was madly in love with her. He married her; they led a wretched life; he took to beating her; at last she died of a broken heart. Of course he had never cared for her. Shocking story, is it not?"

"Very," assented Lottie, in accents of pity.

"I could multiply such cases, in which men have betrayed the affections of loving hearts. A man—at least, I mean, most men, think it no disgrace to lie to a girl; it is a recognised thing when they wish to gain her love. I knew a certain man who made the most desperate love to a beautiful girl—to do him justice, I must say that I think he cared for her a little, at one time. Well, he succeeded in his design; he gained the girl's love and became engaged to her. Then he went away, and within a week he saw some other girl whom he

admired more. What did the villain do ? Why, he abandoned the first one, and engaged himself to the second, like a contemptible scoundrel that he was."

Now Lottie's cheeks turned pale, and a strange flutter seized her heart. What could be the purport of these revelations of man's treachery ? Without seeming to notice her emotion, Fred Coulter went on with his story.

" Yes, he behaved like a villain ; but the girl was a proud and courageous one—I mean, the one whom he had abandoned. She found out that there was another suitor who for years had loved her with a pure love ; he had never dared to breathe a word of love to her—in fact, he never had the chance, for he was a stranger, who worshipped from a distance. He heard of the villainy of the perfidious lover. What did he do ? He sought out the injured girl, told her of his love, persuaded her of its truth, and married her straight off. He loved her with the transcendental love of which I have spoken, and made her the best of husbands. Soon she returned his love, and now they are the happiest couple under the sun."

Lottie gazed at her companion with affrighted eyes ; her face was as white as marble. Fred Coulter resumed, without raising his eyes to hers.

“ I have travelled a good deal, Miss Williams. In the course of my wanderings I found myself at a place in Norway, named Sætersdal. The peasants, in that out-of-the-way spot, have some customs that might, with advantage, be introduced into more civilised society. Amongst them it is deemed a great disgrace to be jilted, as, indeed, it is everywhere. The jilted Sætersdal peasant can, however, convert his disgrace into a triumph over his jilter, by getting married before the marriage of the jilter. Should he do that, he is supposed to wipe out the stigma which his rejection has cast upon him. A most excellent custom, I think.”

“ Why do you tell me all this ?” asked Lottie, faintly.

“ My dear Miss Williams,” replied her companion, dropping his voice to a tone of the deepest commiseration ; “ cannot you guess ? Cannot you imagine the reason that prompted your father to send you away from London ?”

"Oh, no, no!" cried Lottie, "you cannot mean that?"

"Your fears have answered for me, Miss Williams," said Fred Coulter. "Alas! it is but too true."

"No, it cannot be!" cried the poor girl, passionately. Her hand sought the place where, over her heart, she had loved to enshrine Colner's letter. "Ah," she exclaimed, "my letter is gone! Oh, sir, have you found it? I have lost a letter," and she sprang up and began to search the room for the missing epistle, which was, at that moment, in Fred Coulter's pocket. He had read it, with many a curse upon its length, and had gleaned all the information therein contained. He had no further object in detaining it, so he hastened to pacify Lottie's sorrow at its loss.

"You have lost a letter, Miss Williams? Dear me, how strange! Pardon me for an instant. I shall go and ask Mrs. Jones if she has found it," and he left the room.

Fred Coulter soon returned, bearing the precious letter in his hand.

"You dropped it in the carriage," he explained, "and Mrs. Jones, not noticing the address,

picked it up and put it in her pocket. She thought that it was hers."

Lottie eagerly possessed herself of the prized epistle. But what if the declarations that it contained were false? What if the horrible suspicion that the friendly young doctor had suggested to her were true? She felt faint and bewildered.

"I must go home," she murmured. "Let me go to my father and sister."

"My dear Miss Williams," said her companion, leading her to her chair, "sit down and listen to me for awhile."

Lottie seated herself, mechanically. Her brain was in a whirl. She must, however, learn the worst.

"Your suspicions are but too true," said the young man, sighing deeply; "that villain Colner has disgraced himself and dishonoured you. We have learnt to-day that he has engaged himself to somebody else—some girl with money."

"Oh, no; this cannot be true," exclaimed Lottie. "It cannot be, and I refuse to believe it!"

"Alas, it is but too true," sighed Fred

Coulter. "Mrs. Jones and the Reverend Mr. Smith will confirm what I say. In consequence of it, your father begged Mrs. Jones to bring you down here."

The effects of the opiate had not yet worn off. Lottie's head seemed to swim, and she gazed at her companion with eyes dilated with seeming terror. She essayed to speak, but in vain.

"Listen to me, Miss Williams," said the young man; "let me tell you all. This scoundrel has trifled with you; he has thrown you off. Cast him from your heart; forget him."

"No," gasped Lottie.

"It is your father's wish. He sees the disgrace that this villain would inflict upon you, and he wishes to prevent it. There is but one means of doing so. You must marry some one else—some one who loves you truly, and with all his soul; some one who would die to save you from unhappiness. There is such a one to be found—one who for years has loved you, and who now, in this hour of your sorrow, loves you more than ever. His life shall be devoted to you. Marry him and be happy."

There was a wild, frightened glance in Lottie's eyes as she gazed at the young man ; her lips moved convulsively, but no word fell from them.

" Your father wishes you to do this, for he is convinced of the purity of my love—that is—but why should I conceal it longer ? I am the one who for years has loved you ; I it is who would die to secure your happiness. In this hour of your misfortune, my love for you burns more purely—more fiercely than ever. In what words can I tell you of my love ? None can express it ! My life shall be devoted to you, if you will permit it. May I—dare I hope that you will ? Oh ! consent to my prayer, and be happy ! "

Slowly from her chair rose Lottie. Her eyes were fixed upon the young man's face, with a strange gaze ; but, save in her eyes, was there nought in her countenance to denote that she was a being of life. Like some lovely statue stood she there, with one hand grasping the back of the chair for support, the other hand pressed tightly to her heart. Fred Coulter had prepared himself for tears and lamentation ; this

statuesque calmness alarmed him. He hastily sought to bring the matter to a termination.

“Your father is convinced of my love for you. He consented to my procuring a special license to marry you. He wishes us to be married down here, that we may avoid scandal. I cannot find words to tell you of the depth of my love for you; you must learn that from my life. Forget the villain who has deceived you—forget him for ever! I may hope—may I not? Have pity upon me, and bid me live for you.”

Slowly, but with wonderful calmness, Lottie answered—

“You say, sir, that you love me?”

Fred Coulter threw himself upon his knees before her,

“I adore you!” he cried, attempting to unclasp the hand that grasped the chair.

Lottie evaded his touch; a shudder seemed to quiver through her as she felt his hand upon hers. She recoiled from the chair.

“You say, sir, that you love me,” she repeated. “Will you, then, grant my prayer, and take me to my father?”

"I will!" exclaimed the kneeling man, earnestly. "There is a clergyman here; I have obtained a special license; we can be married at once, and then we shall return to your relations. Do you consent to this?" he added, eagerly.

"No," said Lottie; "it must not be. I cannot marry you."

"Think of the falsehood of that scoundrel!" urged Fred Coulter.

"I only know from you that he is false," replied Lottie. "If all that you say is true——"

"I assure you that it is true," protested the young man. "Mrs. Jones and the clergyman will confirm what I say."

"Supposing that he is false to his vows," continued Lottie, speaking in the same strange, calm voice, "shall I be false to mine? No, sir, I can never marry you."

"Do not say that!" cried Fred Coulter, beseechingly. "Think of my love, my adoration! Do not drive me to despair."

"If you love me, you will take me to my father."

"But think how happy you shall make him

if you go to him as my wife. Let me implore you to consent to his wishes and marry me. Do you not believe in my love? I will swear to you——”

“Do not swear. Take me to my father.”

“I will, when we are married. Have you no pride?—no thoughts of revenge against him who has insulted you?”

“I repeat that I cannot marry you. If you have any regard for me, you will cease to urge this matter.”

“Never!” exclaimed the young man, rising from his knees. “Whilst I have life, I shall love you!”

“I cannot listen to you, sir. I shall depart alone;” and Lottie made her way to the door.

“Do not say that!” cried the young man, seizing her hand; “think of my love—of your father’s wish.”

Lottie tore her hand from his grasp; she opened the door and rushed into the hall—the hall door was securely barred and bolted, nor could Lottie open it.

“Open the door, sir!” she cried passionately. “Would you detain me against my will?”

"I cannot let you out until you consent to fulfil your father's wishes," said Fred Coulter.

"I command you to let me out," cried Lottie, her dark eyes flashing with anger; and again she strove to open the door. It was locked, and the key had been taken away. Fred Coulter watched her vain attempts to get out for some time in silence. Then he said, in a soothing tone of voice,

"Pray do not distress yourself unnecessarily, Miss Williams. You cannot get out. Be reasonable, and consent to do as your father wishes you to do."

Without a word, Lottie flew to the door of a room opposite the one in which she had been. She rushed into the room; it was empty and unfurnished, but its solitary window was not barred. There was a hope of escape. Eagerly she sought to unfasten the latch. She had done so, and was preparing to open the window, when Fred Coulter, in alarm, threw his arm round her waist, and pulled her back into the room. With a strength which seemed marvellous in one so delicate, Lottie freed herself from his hold, and again rushed to the window. Ere

she could open it, Fred Coulter was by her side. Inspired by the sense of danger, Lottie dashed her right arm through a pane of glass, and clinging to the window-frame, uttered a piercing cry for help. Vainly did Fred Coulter endeavour to loosen the grasp of her bleeding hands; she clung on to the window-frame, and again and again she shrieked for help. Her cries brought Mrs. Coulter and Ralph into the room. At the sight of the latter, Lottie released her hold, and trembling in every limb, rushed up to him.

“Oh! sir, save me from that man!” she cried; “let me go! let me out of the house, I implore you!”

“My dear Miss Williams,” said Ralph, affecting an air of surprise, “what is this?—what does it mean?”

“I cannot tell you,” panted Lottie; “let me go!”

“Be calm—pray do not alarm yourself,” said he whom Lottie had addressed. “You are quite safe, Miss Williams. Mrs. Jones will take all care of you.”

“I cannot stay here,” cried the poor girl, pas-

sionately. "Oh! madam, have pity upon me, and let me go."

"Are you afraid of me?" asked Mrs. Coulter.

"No, no," protested Lottie. "I thank you for your goodness, but pray suffer me to go away."

"Miss Williams does not believe what I tell her," said Fred Coulter. "Will you assure her that it is the wish of her father that she should marry me? Does he not approve of my love?"

"I assure you, Miss Williams, that it is the case," affirmed Ralph Coulter.

"I cannot marry him; my father could never wish me to do so against my will," said Lottie.

"Consider how he loves you, my dear," put in Mrs Coulter, soothingly.

"I cannot marry him, and I shall not!" declared Lottie.

The brothers exchanged a significant glance. Fred Coulter was about to speak, but Ralph interrupted him.

"You do not know him well enough, Miss Williams. Your refusal is very natural. It was your father's wish that you should remain here for a few days with Mrs. Jones, that you might

have an opportunity of knowing him. When you have learnt his many excellent qualities, perhaps you will not refuse to comply with your father's wish."

"Do not urge me to do this, sir," implored Lottie. "I shall never marry him. Let me return to my father and sister, who must be suffering."

"My child," said Mrs. Coulter, "it is better that you should remain with me for a time."

"Indeed I cannot," protested Lottie. "You will not detain me here against my wish, shall you?"

"My dear Miss Williams," said Ralph Coulter, bowing to her, "of course we can have no such intention. It is Mrs. Jones's wish to make you happy. She is anxious to oblige your father, that is all. It was by his express desire that she brought you here."

"Then I may go?—I may return to my father?" asked Lottie, eagerly.

"If you wish it, most certainly you may," replied Ralph. "But consider, Miss Williams, that your father wishes you to stay here with Mrs. Jones for a few days."

"Yes, my child," urged Mrs. Coulter, "come, do as he wishes. Let me take your jacket off."

"No; thank you for your kindness, madam, but permit me to go home at once," begged Lottie.

"Very well, Miss Williams; as that is your wish, you shall return home," said Ralph. He looked at his watch. "Ah!" he exclaimed, "it is five o'clock. The next train goes at nine. You have four hours to wait."

"Let me go to the railway-station, and wait there," asked Lottie, anxious to escape from the house.

"Oh! Mrs. Jones could not permit such a thing—could you, Mrs. Jones? No, Miss Williams, you must remain here, and I shall have the pleasure of escorting you to the railway."

"Let us go into the other room," said Mrs. Coulter. "This is a cheerless room. Come, my child," and she preceded Lottie into the apartment in which Fred Coulter had made his confession.

"May I speak to you, Miss Williams?" asked Fred Coulter, humbly.

“Pray do not,” begged Lottie, dreading a repetition of his vows.

“Have you no wish to be revenged upon the villain who has betrayed your love?” whispered the young man.

“Oh, do not talk of that. I cannot think of it,” exclaimed Lottie, with difficulty restraining her tears.

“Do you hate me, Miss Williams?” continued Fred Coulter. “Have I no hope of forgiveness? Can you not pardon my love?”

“Yes, yes, I shall forget all that has happened; but do not distress me further,” begged the young girl.

“I think that we had better leave Miss Williams alone for awhile,” suggested Ralph Coulter. “It is quite dark now. I shall light the candles.”

He lighted the candles, stirred the fire, pulled down the blind, and prepared to leave the room.

“Good-bye, for the present, my child,” said Mrs. Coulter. “Tea will be ready soon; I shall bring you some.”

“Farewell, Miss Williams,” sighed Fred Coulter,

Lottie murmured a few words in reply, and the mother and her sons departed. When left alone, the courage which had hitherto animated the poor girl deserted her, and throwing herself upon the sofa and covering her face with her hands, she burst into a flood of tears.

Mrs. Coulter and her sons made their way to a small room at the end of the passage. Ralph closed the door carefully, and then turning to his brother he cried fiercely,

“A pretty mess you’ve made of the affair!”

“What do you mean?” asked his brother, in tones as angry as his own.

“That you’ve bungled like an idiot,” answered Ralph.

“Don’t talk like that to me!” exclaimed Fred.

“What more could I have done?”

“What more could you have done? What less could you have done, you mean,” sneered Ralph.

Fred muttered something in angry reply. Their mother hastened to pacify them.

“Do not quarrel, my dear boys,” she said. “What are we to do now? Do you intend to let the girl go away, my dear Ralph?”

“ You must be mad to think of such a thing,” cried her son. “ No, we must get her away somewhere else. We must take her down to that place in Wiltshire. I should have taken her there at first, had I not thought that Fred would have managed matters here.”

“ I did what I could,” said Fred surlily.

“ Well, there is no use in talking about it now. The people are coming into the next house to-morrow morning. That was another idiotic thing to do! Why didn’t you take both houses?”

“ How could I foresee all this delay ?” angrily asked Fred. “ I thought that we should get hold of the girl at once. I thought, too, that the next house would remain unlet; these two houses had been unoccupied for a couple of years.”

“ You thought, did you ?” sneered his brother. “ You should have made sure. Didn’t I beg you to take a detached house? Now, then, no time is to be lost. You must go down into Wiltshire, to the place that I took, at once. A train leaves here for Reading in half an hour. Go by that; get all straight, and the Mater and I shall bring the girl on.”

"How can we do that, dear Ralph?" inquired his mother.

"How? Easily enough. You must give her some more opiate in her tea. Don't have tea before eight o'clock. Now, mother, don't kick up a row, and raise objections. It must be done, so that is settled. You be off at once, Fred, or you may miss the train. Have a carriage ready at Swindon. Tell the people that it's for a young lady who is insane—or no—don't tell them anything—you may bungle it."

"You couldn't have done more than I did," retorted Fred.

"Couldn't I?" declared Ralph. "The idea of letting her make all that noise, when people were about! But never mind—go at once. I shall walk to the station with you—I must tell you certain things. Go to the girl, mother. Cheer her up; tell her any lies you like, to keep her quiet; you understand. I shall be back soon. Come along, Fred," and Ralph Coulter left the room, and, directly afterwards, quitted the house, with his brother.

An oversight on the part of Fred Coulter had proved the means of salvation for Lottie. In

his search for a house suitable for the perpetration of the meditated crime, he had come across an old farmhouse, standing away from the road, and distant from any other dwellings. It was a large farmhouse, of greater size than the exigencies of its owner required, and it had, accordingly, been converted into two houses. Either house had been uninhabited for two years, and Fred Coulter had presumed that it would be long before a tenant was found for them; he had, therefore, taken but one of them. His brother had gone farther from London in search of a suitable place, and had secured a detached, furnished cottage down in Wiltshire; but the greater convenience of the farmhouse near Feltham, which was within a drive of London, had induced him to consent to convey Lottie thither. To their confusion, the brothers learnt, upon the very day of the abduction, that a tenant had been found for the other part of the farmhouse. This had perplexed them greatly. If Lottie had proved tractable, there would have been no difficulty in the case, but her violent resistance alarmed them, for, with people living in the next house, her cries must attract attention,

and lead to the defeat of all their schemes. It was, therefore, a matter, of paramount importance that they should convey her to some spot where, removed from all help, the poor girl might be compelled to submit to their wishes. Such a place Ralph Coulter had discovered, and thither it was determined to convey Lottie.

CHAPTER IX.

FRIENDLY COUNSEL.

WHEN Herbert Colner came to his senses, he found himself lying upon the floor of the waiting-room, his head supported by his friend Haller, and a kind-hearted lady, who happened to be present, bathing his temples with Eau-de-Cologne. Haller gave a great cry of joy as Colner opened his eyes, for he was alarmed at the length of his friend's swoon. Gradually Colner recovered from the effects of his faint, and then they assisted him to his feet and seated him in a chair. Haller had despatched a porter for some brandy; the man soon returned with a glass full of that spirit, which Haller compelled his friend to swallow.

"There, you are better now, Tommy, old

man, are you not?" he asked, patting Colner on the back. "The idea of your fainting, Tommy! 'pon my word, I shouldn't have suspected you of being capable of such a thing. Cheer up, old man; will you have some more brandy?"

Colner shook his head faintly. He felt very weak and cold, and his limbs trembled.

"Do you not think that you had better take your friend to the hotel?" suggested the lady who had bathed Colner's temples. "He seems very faint; he ought not to travel."

"Thank you, ma'am," said Haller. "Will you come to the hotel, Tommy? I shall go with you."

Again Colner shook his head wearily.

"All right, then, Tommy; you want to go to London, don't you? I'm going up, so I can look after you. Have you got your ticket? No? I shall get two, then. Do you mind staying with him for a bit, ma'am, whilst I get our tickets?"

The lady protested her willingness to do so, and whispered to her maid, who was standing by, to get her salts, which were in her travelling-bag. These she tendered to Colner, who in-

haled their fumes. Presently Haller returned with the tickets.

Then a bell rang, to announce the coming of the train.

"I can't thank you enough for your kindness, ma'am," said Haller, to the charitable lady. "I feel deeply indebted to you. Good-bye. My friend and I shall get into an empty carriage, as we have matters to discuss. Now, porter, give a hand. Up you go, Tommy!"

Assisted by Haller and the porter, Colner got into the carriage, and sank back helplessly into a seat. He felt very cold and numb, nor could he collect his thoughts sufficiently to understand the questions that Haller put to him, and to frame responses to them. Haller strove to cheer him up.

"Well, my Tommy," he cried, after a vain attempt to find out what had brought his friend to Hounslow, "you may think yourself preciously lucky that I was on the platform. If I hadn't caught you as you fainted, you would have been under the wheels of a luggage-train. It was a precious squeak for you, old boy. How do you feel now? Poor old Tommy, your hands are

like ice ; here, let me rub them for you. Your clothes, too, are wet. You have been in the rain. What a careless old beggar you are!"

Haller applied himself vigorously to chafe the hands of his friend. Gradually the mists which clouded Colner's brain rolled off. He reflected upon the enormity of the crime that he had so nearly committed, and fervently he thanked God for having interposed between him and perdition.

"There, Tommy, they are warmer now," said Haller, as, after several minutes' application, he succeeded in restoring some warmth to Colner's hands. "You look awfully pale; have you a headache ? No? That's all right; you'll soon be yourself again. And why haven't you written to me, eh? You're a nice fellow to keep a promise, are you not? Longley and I have been burning with anxiety to hear from you. Longley is in town, stopping at our hotel. You must have quite a history to tell us, haven't you?"

A shudder thrilled through Colner ; Haller noticed it, and attributed it to the recollection of some unpleasant event. He hastily sought to turn Colner's thoughts from this.

“ We had rare jokes down at Leamington. I wish that you had been there with us, old man. They are nice people, those relations of Longley’s. The girls are pretty—yes, uncommonly pretty. I almost lost my heart to one of them. I should have gone the whole animal and done it utterly, if it hadn’t been for some other fellow—a man from Cambridge. Ah, she was an arrant little flirt! I don’t mind a little flirtation—no, far from it. In itself, I consider flirtation, pure and simple, as innocent as it is amusing; but one must draw the line somewhere, you know. Yes, hang it, one must do that, and I draw the line at a Cambridge man. Couldn’t stand that, you know. *Sic me servavit Apollo*, my Tommy.”

Much to Haller’s disappointment, this account of his escape from the snares of Cupid failed to elicit a smile from Colner. Haller resumed his effort to interest his friend.

“ There was a gardener at Leamington, Tommy. Such a joke he was! He fancied that he was a great politician, and he kept Longley and me in fits. We drew him when we had nothing better to do. One day we asked him what his

opinion as to the policy of Napoleon was. He stuck his spade into the ground, and made answer thus, ‘Well, sir, you see as how he has many enemies. In course he has, for that is but natural like. Some on ‘em calls him a *coodytar*, some on ‘em calls him a *plebby-city*, but I calls him a rare good ‘un. That’s what ‘I calls him.’ Why don’t you laugh, Tommy? ‘Pon my word, a good story is lost on you !’

There was not the least sign in Colner’s face to denote that he had heard the anecdote. Nothing daunted, Haller rattled away as gaily as ever.

“My people were up in Oxford last week. My mother and the girls had been longing to go there for an age, but my governor, who, as you know, is rather a mean-minded man, had always refused to take them up in Term Term. He is afraid of my launching out into wild and reckless extravagance, I suppose. Well, it struck him that he might gratify their desires at little cost, by taking them up during the vacation, when nobody would be there. He had some business up at Oxford, too, so he also thought that he might immolate a couple of victims

with one missile. Up they went, the whole gang of them, whilst I was staying with Longley. My governor didn't see the fun of lionising them, so he engaged a tout, that old chap with the tall hat, who is always hanging about the schools, to show them over the place. In their perambulation they came to St. Kenelm's. As is the fashion, they paused to admire the Martyr's Memorial. One of my sisters is my informant as to what took place then. The tall-hatted tout duly lauded the beauties of the Memorial, and then he turned round towards St. Kenelm's. 'This, ladies,' he said, 'is St. Kenelm's College, a college celebrated for the wisdom and learning of its members.' My mother hastened to explain that she was the mamma of one of the wise and learned. 'Then, ma'am,' resumed the tout, 'you are aware that this is the College to which the celebrated Professor Bills belongs. That window there is the window of the celebrated Professor's room.' The tout paused, and, stooping down, picked up a handful of gravel, which he cast at Bills' window. An angry face looked out of the window. 'That, ladies,' said the tout, blandly, pointing to the face, 'is the

celebrated Professor Bills'. What do you think of that, my Tommy?"

The ghost of a smile appeared on Colner's face. Encouraged by this, Haller chatted on more gaily than ever. When he had exhausted his copious stock of stories, he strove to amuse his friend by singing the latest comic song to him. It was an ungrateful task, and Haller was heartily thankful when the train reached its destination. By that time Colner had recovered from the effects of his swoon, and was able to walk, unassisted, to a cab. Haller and Longley were staying at the hotel in which Colner was wont to take up his quarters when in town. Longley was in when the two arrived. Colner's pale face and mud-bespattered garments were sufficient indication that something had happened to him; so, without making any inquiry as to the cause of his friend's plight, Longley, who met them in the hall, led the way to his bedroom, in which blazed a cheerful fire. Haller ordered a supply of whisky and hot water, and having brewed three grogs, one of which had a double allowance of whisky in it, for Colner, he proceeded to tell Longley, how, return-

ing from a dinner at Hounslow, he had encountered their friend.

"Now, Tommy, old man," he said, after he had concluded his account, "you know that I have no wish to be inquisitive, but it is evident to me that something very serious has happened to you. I have been waiting for you to tell me what it is. You can trust Longley and me, old fellow, can't you?"

Colner looked at his two friends; he saw their kindly looks, and in his heart he felt grateful to Heaven for the haven of sympathy that was open to him. He bent forward, placing his elbows upon his knees and his face between his hands, and, looking into the fire, said sadly,

"Yes, something has happened. I would that I were dead!"

"Hush, old fellow," said Longley, reprovingly, "do not say that. You are not a coward, and it is only the coward who cannot face misfortune. What has happened?"

"I am a coward," cried Colner, passionately. "I cannot bear my misery!" and he covered his face with his hands.

Haller and Longley exchanged a glance full

of pity ; then the former placed his hand gently upon his friend's arm, and again asked him to tell them what had happened.

" My father has disowned me ; he has given me up for ever !" began Colner.

" Well, don't take on about that, Tommy," advised Haller, consolingly. " He cannot mean it. Bless you, my governor has threatened to disown me, no end of times. He has told me of his intention to do so, so many times that I should not feel a bit put out if he carried his threat into execution some fine morning. You're not used to it, old man, and you take his threat for a reality. Cheer up, now ! "

" Be quiet, Punch," said Longley ; " there is something else that Colner has to tell. Is it about Miss Williams, Colner ? I trust that it is not."

" She has deceived me," exclaimed Colner ; " she has betrayed me, and broken my heart ! "

Haller and Longley sat silent for some minutes. What consolation could they offer to Colner in his distress ? They waited to hear further particulars of Lottie's treachery.

" Yes," continued Colner at last, " she has

deceived me ; she has run away from her home with some other man."

"Can this be true ?" asked his two friends in a breath.

"Yes, it is true enough," said Colner, bitterly. "Her own father told me all about it. It is too true."

Many and sincere were the condolences with which his friends sought to assuage the bitterness of his grief. Colner sat gazing vacantly into the fire, rocking himself to and fro. For a long time he was deaf to the voice of sympathy.

Then, as clearly as he could, he told them all. He disguised nothing, not even his attempt to commit suicide. His friends sat silent, grieving at his misery. A long silence followed the conclusion of his story. Longley was the first to break it.

"I feel most deeply for you," he said, in accents which betrayed the depth of his emotion ; "but you must be a man, Colner. You must forget what has happened."

Colner shook his head. How could he hope to be able to forget the past ?

" You must go in for hard work," continued Longley. " You must manage to leave no minute of your time unoccupied. Your father will forgive you when he hears that your engagement with Miss Williams is broken off, for, I presume, that is the sole cause of his anger against you ; is it not ?"

" Yes," assented Colner, " but I shall not ask his forgiveness."

" Do not be foolish, Colner," remonstrated Longley. " You need not ask his forgiveness, exactly. It will be sufficient for you to write a short note, and, without entering into any reasons, to announce that your engagement is at an end."

" I shall not write to him," declared Colner, firmly.

" Well, then, write to your mother," said Longley, " that will do as well; she will set matters to rights."

" No," persisted Colner, in a tone of dogged determination, " I shall not write to anybody. If they choose to cast me off, let them do so. I shall beg nobody's pardon."

" You needn't beg anybody's pardon," said

Longley. "Just write to your mother, as I advise; then come up to Oxford with Punch and me; we are going up the day after to-morrow. There will be plenty going on, to divert your mind from thoughts of this miserable affair. You will have to grind for the 'Varsity Eight; then there will be the Torpid to be coached; you can get on with your reading, too. Yes, there will be plenty for you to do. You must come back to Oxford with us."

"I shall not return to Oxford," declared Colner.

"Not return to Oxford!" cried Haller, incredulously. "Oh, come, Tommy, you mustn't say that. What should we do without you? Then, as Longley very truly says, there will be lots to occupy your mind and distract your attention from this unhappy business. Yes, Tommy, you really must come up."

"I have made my mind up not to return there," said Colner, "and I shall not. Do you think that I could read? Reading would drive me mad. Then what do I care for our Eight, or the Torpid? Nothing. I shall not go back."

Vainly did his two friends endeavour to com-

bat this determination. Neither argument nor prayer could induce Colner to forego his resolve. He had inherited much of his father's obstinacy, and their entreaties only strengthened him in his resolution. At last Longley inquired what course his obstinate friend wished to pursue.

"I shall go abroad," answered Colner. "I must have change of scene. I must get away from England, where everything will be hateful to me, I don't care what becomes of me. I shall go to Africa, to America, anywhere where I can have excitement. I shall leave England to-morrow."

Longley and Haller looked at each other as if they thought their friend had taken leave of his senses. It was evidently useless to argue with him, for his mind seemed made up. It remained to mitigate the evils that his determination seemed likely to bring down upon his head.

"Then you are firmly resolved, no matter what may happen, to leave England at once?" asked Longley, after he had for a long time vainly expostulated with his friend.

"I am," said Colner.

"How do you intend to live? You have no

money of your own, I suppose, and travelling is expensive."

Colner had not thought of this. He paused to consider his friend's question, and then answered,

"Oh, I shall live somehow. I can work for my living."

"Without money you must come to want. You have just told us that what has happened will incapacitate you for work, and I can well believe that it will."

"I daresay that I shall be able to borrow money from some friend—some small sum, that will keep me for a time," answered Colner. "I suppose that I have some friends left. I beg your pardons, old fellows," he added, hastily, colouring with shame at this ungenerous speech. "I know that you are my friends—true friends as ever man had, but I don't want to borrow money of you."

"Stuff and nonsense, Tommy!" cried Haller. "Don't be a confounded old idiot. You shall borrow money of me. Now don't refuse; you will make me very angry if you refuse. I have plenty of money just now—yes, I have succeed-

ed in bleeding my governor pretty freely. I feel all the pride of a millionaire just now. I can lend you fifty pounds without feeling it."

"If you doubt Haller's friendship," said Longley "you won't do it after I tell you something. With the greatest difficulty, he has succeeded in persuading his father to give him—

"You hold your tongue—don't be a fool," exclaimed Haller springing up, rushing upon Longley and clapping a hand over his mouth. Longley released himself, and, in defiance of Haller's protestations, and threats of mortal enmity should he divulge certain matters, went on :

"To give him seventy pounds. Of this he offers you fifty. Could friendship do more?"

"Never mind what he says, Tommy," cried Haller, "Indeed I don't want more than twenty pounds. Make me happy by taking fifty; do, there's a good old fellow."

"He wants every farthing of it, and more too," declared Longley, a declaration which evoked a flat denial from Haller.

"Thank you, Punch," said Colner, deeply touched by this proof of Haller's friendship,

"but I cannot take your money; I shall not want it. I can manage to find what I want."

"I should not have divulged this," said Longley, "if I had not a remedy to propose. I shall lend you what you want, Colner. Now, don't refuse; listen to me. I am my own master, have neither father nor mother, brother nor sister—nobody, in short, who has any claim upon me. I have more money than I can spend, and I have a good balance at my banker's. Any sum that I can lend you is freely at your service."

"I feel extremely grateful to both of you for your goodness," protested Colner. "I shall accept your kind offer, Longley. Will you lend me fifty pounds? That, with what I have, will carry me on for a long time."

Longley, in reply, took his cheque-book out of his dispatch-box and wrote out an order.

"There, old man," he said, "there is a cheque for a hundred pounds; it will be better than fifty. Now, no thanks," he added as Colner proceeded to thank him. "Let us talk over your plans. Will you be guided by me?"

"If I can," answered Colner.

"You want to leave England; well, you shall

do so. You want excitement—you shall have it. Instead of going out to Africa or America, or any outlandish place, you shall go to Norway. Living is inexpensive there, and, moreover, you will not be so far off from your friends. You will find plenty to do there. You can hunt bears, if you like—you can go out with the fishermen—you'll find excitement enough in that, I warrant you. You can fish—you can go up to the far north, and see the Lapps and Finns."

"And career about behind the playful reindeer," put in Haller. "Think of the playful reindeer, Tommy!"

"You will find much to do, and, what is important, you'll be out of harm's way. Think of the splendid scenery of the North—the glories of the Northern Lights—the midnight sun. Yes, Norway is the country for you."

"I will go to Norway, then," said Colner, without evincing much interest in his friend's account of the wonders which there awaited the traveller.

"You cannot do better," exclaimed Longley. "Then, there is another reason why I wish you to go there. I intend to go out to Norway

again, this Summer. We shall meet out there, and then we shall be able to discuss matters calmly, after your grief has in some measure subsided."

"I shall go out too," cried Haller. "I shall insist upon my governor's standing it. Yes, we shall meet there, and be jolly. Three cheers for Norway! If my governor raises any objections I shall threaten to disown him."

"I shall be most happy to meet you out there," said Colner. "To me all places are much the same, as long as I can find something to do in them."

"Cheer up, Tommy!" exclaimed Haller. "One would think that you were going to a funeral instead of to a land which is a perfect Paradise. Think of the playful reindeer, Tommy, and be glad. Laugh, old fellow. I'll tell you a story. I dined at Lincoln's Inn the other day; I'm eating my dinners there, you know, in deference to my governor's wishes. He thinks that I am an embryo Lord Chancellor."

"I should hardly think that, Punch, from what you have told me of the paternal opinion of you," interrupted Longley.

"Never you mind," said Haller. "If he doesn't he ought to, so it comes to exactly the same thing in the end. Well, I was eating a dinner, and chummed considerably with the man sitting next me. He seemed a decent kind of a bird; we went together to the theatre afterwards. As we were walking hitherwards, for our ways lay together, I thought that my friend had something on his mind. The moment for our adieux came, and then my friend inquired earnestly if I had anything particular to do, the next morning. No, I was disengaged. 'Then,' said he, cheerfully, 'will you go with me to a funeral? It will be quite a quiet affair; now do come.' I went, and enjoyed it very much."

"Come, come, Punch, you're joking," said Longley.

"Not a bit of it," protested Haller. "Colner's face looks so glum that he reminded me of the event. I was thinking how much more cheerful the faces of the mourners were."

"And you wish to leave England at once?" asked Longley, turning to Colner, who was gazing into the fire.

"Yes, to-morrow, if I can," he replied.

“Very well, I shall manage it for you,” said Longley. “But will you not write a few lines home first, to say that you are about to leave England?”

“I do not mind doing that,” answered Colner, “but I shall not make any excuses. Nothing shall keep me in England.”

“I am glad that you consent to write. It is only proper that you should do so. You need not make any great preparations for your departure. You can get anything you want out in Norway. I have a gun and fishing-rod in town; you shall take them. Is there anything else that you require, in way of outfit, that I can lend you?”

“Can’t you lend him a nose-protector?” asked Haller. “Think of our Tommy without a nose.”

“No fear of his losing it,” replied Longley, laughing at Haller’s assumed gravity.

“Shall I not require furs?” asked Colner.

“You can get them better and for less money out there,” answered his friend. “Is there anything else that you have to do before you leave England? I mean, old man, do you intend to

call on Mr. Williams ? I think that you had better not, under the circumstances."

"Perhaps you are right," replied Colner, gloomily. "No, I shall write to him before I go. That will be sufficient."

Haller had brewed three more glasses of grog. "Come, my friends," he exclaimed, handing their tumblers to them, "let us make a night of it, in honour of you, my dear old Tommy. I drink to you, Tommy, and I pray for your welfare and happiness."

Longley joined in the toast with all earnestness.

The three young men then proceeded to discuss a variety of matters connected with Colner's departure from England. The late dawn of the January morning had broken before they separated, Haller and Longley to rest, Colner to meditation. At last Colner closed the shutters of his room, and throwing himself, dressed as he was, upon his bed, he tried to sleep. How vain was his attempt ! Thoughts of the past harassed his mind and rendered sleep impossible. He tried to dismiss them and to turn his thoughts to the future. That prospect was

hardly less miserable. His future lay before him as a blank, unrelieved by any object to which he might aspire, any happiness for which he might hope. Solitude alone seemed to present a charm to him. In Norway that solitude was to be found, and there, in the excitement of peril, he might in time forget his grief.

Colner's arrangements for leaving England were soon completed. Before his departure he wrote to his mother and Mr. Williams. The latter he thanked for his kindness to him, and without referring to the cause of his leaving England, told him that it was his intention to travel for an indefinite time. His mother he simply informed of his departure, nor did he give her any address to which she might write to him. Haller and Longley accompanied their friend as far as Dover, and there, in sorrow, they bade him farewell.

Colner arrived in Norway without misadventure. There let us leave him. Throughout the length of the great Scandinavian peninsula he wandered, seeking for rest, seeking for something that might banish the memory of his past sorrow. Alas! how presumptuous are the

thoughts of man, which imagine that the decrees of heaven may be altered. In the endurance of hardships, in the excitement of danger, he strove, oh! how hard, how vainly he strove! to tear himself from his thoughts, to find in the present oblivion of the past. But it was not to be. Upon the boundless fjelds, where no other voice than that of Nature fell upon his ear, upon the pathless wastes of snow, upon the watery mountains of the Atlantic, lashed into fury by the stormy West wind, the recollection of past happiness ever haunted him, and bade the memory of his love to forsake him not.

CHAPTER X.

A SUSPICION.

SEVERAL days passed without bringing to Mr. Williams any tidings of his missing daughter. Had it not been for the protestations of Polly, who steadfastly believed that her sister must be the victim of some plot against her liberty, he would have striven to dismiss Lottie from his thoughts, as being unworthy of his solicitude. Polly, however, could not endure that her sister should be suspected of a crime against which her own sense of right revolted. Her love for Lottie was her reason—a poor one, perhaps, but none the less steadfast on that account. Mr. Williams had ceased to urge upon her his conviction that Lottie must be guilty, for the merest hint that he still entertained that

conviction was sufficient to excite the anger of the warm-hearted Polly.

"I know Lottie better than you do, pa," she would exclaim, "and I am certain that she is utterly incapable of doing such a wicked thing as this. Why should she have behaved in this manner? Can you tell me? No, you can't. You don't know how she loved Mr. Colner. Why, she would talk to me about him for hours. She worshipped the ground he walked on. And you think that she didn't care for him; that she could have deserted him in this manner. It's a shame, pa; I am sorry to think that you can be so hard-hearted. No, it's a wicked plot against her, that it is, and you ought to try to find it out. Oh! I wish that I were a man; I would soon find out the truth!"

Mr. Williams would endeavour to soothe his daughter's distress, by begging her to be composed, and to wait for a few days, in the hope that they might learn further tidings of Lottie. He had but little hope of receiving tidings, though; nor, in truth, did he care to receive them, for, as he thought, they could but confirm his suspicions. And so the days wore on, and

a week passed without bringing news of the missing girl.

Upon the morning of the eighth day after her disappearance, a letter came to Mr. Williams from Mrs. Martin. He was at breakfast with his daughter when it arrived. Seeing from whom the letter was, Mr. Williams laid it aside, with a sigh. Not a day had passed without Lottie's old friend writing to him, to inquire if he had received tidings of his daughter. This letter, he thought, was but a repetition of her inquiries. Polly took it up, and, recognising the handwriting, begged her father to open it immediately.

"Who knows, pa," she said "but that it contains some news of dear Lottie? Pray read it at once."

Shaking his head sadly, Mr. Williams opened the letter. Polly, watching him anxiously as he read, saw an expression of surprise lighten up his face. There must be news in the letter. She jumped up from her chair, and leaning over her father's shoulder, perused the epistle. It ran thus:

"Dear Mr. Williams, I have just recalled a

circumstance that happened some two or three months ago, which may throw some light upon the disappearance of our dear girl. I was ill when it happened, and so many events have occurred to worry me since then, that it escaped my memory. Moreover, I intended to tell you of it personally. A long time elapsed without my seeing you, and when, eventually, you paid me a visit, your news was of so distressing a nature that I could think of nothing else. Pray forgive my forgetfulness. I thought that the affair was of little or no consequence, at the time, or I should have communicated with you about it at once."

"Prosy old creature!" muttered Mr. Williams.
"Ah, here we have the event!" He read on, aloud:

"A gentleman, who gave the name of Mr. John Smith, called upon me to ask if I could tell him anything about Mr. Serrall or his family. You doubtless remember that when you changed your name you requested me to give no information about you, to anyone who should inquire after you in your real name. Mindful of this, I answered that I could tell him nothing of

you. He pressed me hard to tell him your address, assuring me that it was from friendly motives alone that he sought to learn it. I declined to inform him of it, remembering your injunctions upon the subject, and, thereupon, he went away."

"The old idiot!" exclaimed Mr. Williams. "Why could she not have told me of this before?"

"Then was your name Serrall, pa?" asked Polly.

"Yes, my sweet love. I changed it, through your uncle's advice. What else does this old woman say? That she is sorry—was unwell—worried—affair of probably no importance. There are excuses for you! Now let us see what this may mean."

"Oh! pa, dear," exclaimed Polly, "do you think that this man is the one who has run away with Lottie? Can it be?"

"Be quiet, my precious one; let your father think. Mr. John Smith—no, I can recall no one of that name who, after all this lapse of time, should want to see me."

"It's an assumed name, perhaps, pa," sug-

gested Polly, eagerly. "Smith is such a common name. Lizzie Wells, whose mother keeps the pop-shop round in Dean Street——"

"My beloved pet," said Mr. Williams, interrupting her, and regarding her with one of his judicial looks, "you must not talk of pop-shops. It is not a lady-like word, nor, indeed, should a young lady know anything of such things. Alas! that my daughter should have gone to school with a girl whose father is a pawn-broker!"

"Never mind that, pa," cried Polly.

"But I do mind it, sweetest child," said her father. "My greatest grief is that I have been unable to give you an education befitting my daughter. Well, my pet, what were you about to observe?"

"That Lizzie Wells told me that everyone who popped—I mean, pa dear, put away things," said Polly, hastily correcting herself, "in a false name, took the name of Smith. This man may have assumed the name."

"Perhaps, my darling, perhaps," answered her father, thoughtfully. "Let us make sure, though. Go into the next room, my pet, and

bring me a small box that you will see on the mantel-piece."

Polly hastened to execute the commission, and soon returned, bearing the box which her father required.

"Now, my beloved child," said Mr. Williams, "we shall soon find out if we know this Mr. John Smith. I have always made a point of entering the name of any person with whom I have any dealings, friendly or otherwise, in a book. Such a register is of the greatest value, my darling. There is the book. Let us turn to the index and look at the Smiths."

Mr. Williams opened the book, which was half-filled with memoranda relating to different persons. Great pains had been taken with the index. The names of those whom the memoranda concerned were therein arranged in alphabetical order, and figures after the names referred to the pages whereon any notes about the possessors of the names were to be found. More than a dozen Smiths had been registered in the book, and, of these, three had J for the initial of their Christian name.

"It isn't that one," muttered Mr. Williams,

referring to his notes. "No, his name is James. He was a fellow of whom I bought a horse once. Here is a John, but he can't be the man. He had to leave England suddenly—yes, he forgot his own name."

"Forgot his own name, pa!" exclaimed Polly.

"Yes, my pet, in signing a bill. I lost money by him. He was never caught. A clever scamp, but devoid of any principle. Here is another John. No, poor fellow, that cannot be the one. He cut his throat after the Derby of '50. Let us look at the other Smiths. Those four were tradespeople. I fear that I owe them a trifle, but they couldn't wish to remind me of the unpleasant fact. W. Smith; who was he? Ah, yes; he ran away with a friend's wife, and the friend shot him. No, darling pet, there is no Smith entered here, who could wish to see me." And Mr. Williams closed the book, and locked it up in the box again.

"Well, pa dear," said Polly, anxiously, "do you think that the person who called upon Mrs. Martin could have assumed the name?"

"What could his object have been? If I were not convinced that the Coulters are ignor-

ant of our existence, I might suppose that it was one of them. No, darling child, I am puzzled. It was very remiss of that old woman not to tell me of this before. Then, again, she gives no description of this John Smith. It would be a mercy to put her into the asylum for idiots."

"But don't you think it possible, pa, that the Coulters may have found out about us somehow or other? Uncle may have left some papers from which they have learnt the fact."

"Sweetest child," replied her father, "I have thought of that, but it doesh't solve the mystery. When you first mentioned to me your suspicion that your sister was the victim of some plot, I naturally asked myself this question, 'Who can the plotters be, and what can be their object?'"

"They may have found out, pa dear, that uncle left his money to Lottie. Wouldn't that account for it?"

"Not at all, my precious one," answered Mr. Williams. "You must consider that, to have ascertained that, they must have found the will that your uncle made in her favour. Now, if they had done so, what could have been easier

for them than to destroy the will? I am convinced that they are unscrupulous enough to have done so, had they had the chance."

"Well, then, pa dear," suggested Polly, "somebody else may have found the will. Yes, that's probable enough, isn't it?"

"No, my darling pet," said her father, "such a thing is barely possible. How could they have abducted your sister without her offering any resistance, without leaving any trace of the abduction? No, sweet one, I honour and admire you for your sisterly love, but I fear—I fear—" And Mr. Williams shook his head gravely.

"You shan't accuse Lottie of this," cried Polly, passionately. "No, I shall never believe it against her until it's proved. I know how she loved Mr. Colner. And he believes her guilty, and has gone away with a broken heart—oh! it's too bad of you!" And she sat down in a chair and began to cry.

"My sweetest child," said Mr. Williams, distressed at the sight of Polly's tears, "do not cry."

"I'm not crying," exclaimed Polly, turning her back upon him.

"Well, then, darling one, compose yourself," begged her father. "Don't add to my unhappiness, my precious child. Your father has sorrows to make him miserable enough already."

"Forgive me, pa dear," sobbed Polly, going to her father and kissing him. "I do not want to make you unhappy, but please don't accuse dear Lottie."

"I won't, my angel, I won't," answered her father, returning her kiss. "Now brighten up, my precious. Wipe those sweet eyes and look happy again. That's a darling pet. Now get your things on, and we will go and see Mrs. Martin."

Polly hurried off to attire herself for the walk, and the father and daughter shortly afterwards departed in quest of further information as to the mysterious Mr. John Smith.

They found Mrs. Martin at home, evidently expectant of their coming. After the interchange of salutations, and inquiries for news of Lottie, the old lady began to apologise to Mr. Williams for her neglect in not having informed him of the circumstance about which she had written to him. He checked her in her apologies.

" You were ill, my dear Mrs. Martin ; pray make no further excuses. After all, the matter may be of trivial consequence. Will you oblige me with certain particulars of your interview with this Mr. Smith ? Was he an old or a young man ?"

" A young man," answered Mrs. Martin. " I should not think that he could have been more than thirty years old, if as much. I fear that I have been very culpable in not telling you of his visit before, for it has occurred to me, since writing to you, that he answers the description of the man with whom Lottie departed."

A cry of joy burst from Polly's lips. To her this seemed a confirmation of her suspicion that her sister was the victim of a plot. Mr. Williams' face turned a shade paler ; he knitted his brows, and exclaimed excitedly,

" Make no excuses, Mrs. Martin. Describe him to me as accurately as you can. Was he tall or short ?"

" Tall," answered Mrs. Martin—" nearly six feet tall."

" Fair or dark ?"

" Very dark ; his hair and whiskers were

black, so was his moustache. He was a handsome man—not stout, but, I should say, very well made."

"Oh ! Mrs. Martin, why did you not tell me of this before ? Never mind, say nothing more about it ; the mischief is done. And did he give any explanation of his wish to see me ?"

"He gave me to understand that he was a friend of yours. When he found that he could obtain no information about you from me, he asked if it was true that you had children. I told him that it was impossible that I could inform him, leading him to suppose that I did not know. Then he went away."

"Could he have found out anything from the servants ?"

"No, for they do not know the name of Serrall."

"True," mused Mr. Williams. "Thank you, Mrs. Martin. I grieve that I did not know of this before. Pray make no excuses. You were unwell—worried ; I can understand it all. Come, Polly, my love. Good-bye, Mrs. Martin. Should this give me a clue to the disappear-

“ance of my daughter, I shall let you know.”

“Where are we going to, pa?” asked Polly, as they left the house and hurried down the street in a direction opposite to that whence they had come.

“To make inquiries about the Coulters, my darling; they live close by. It is long since I have seen them, but from what Mrs. Martin has told me, I begin to suspect that one of them must be at the bottom of this affair. The man answers their description.”

“I am sure, pa dear, that there is some plot against Lottie. Do you not think so yourself, now?”

“I cannot say, darling one. Do not talk; let me think the matter over;” and the two walked on in silence.

At last Mr. Williams paused.

“This, my darling, is the street in which your uncle lived; that was his house,” he informed Polly, pointing to Langstone House. “The blinds are down; the Coulters seem to be away. Now to obtain our information. Ah! there is a policeman; he will do.”

Mr. Williams and his daughter crossed the

road, and hastened after a member of the police force, who was walking away from them. They soon overtook him, and Mr. Williams, taking a shilling out of his pocket, accosted him.

"It is a cold day, my friend ; get yourself a glass of something hot with this ;" and Mr. Williams presented him with the coin, which the man pocketed, expressing as he did so his thanks for the present. " You know the family living at Langstone House ?" inquired Mr. Williams.

" Yes, sir," answered the policeman. " The house belonged to a Mr. Wilson, who died about three months ago. Some relations of his, named Coulter, live there now."

" Thank you, my friend," said Mr. Williams. " Are they in London now, do you know ?"

" No, sir ; I haven't seen any of them for more than a week."

" Ah ! indeed. What kind of men are the gentlemen of the family ? There are two of them, I think ?"

" Yes, sir. They are tall, good-looking men."

“One of them, I think, is about six feet high, with black hair, whiskers, and moustache, is he not?”

“That’s the youngest one, sir; the other is a taller and bigger man, and he has a long black beard, which comes down to his waist.”

Polly with difficulty repressed an exclamation at this news, for the description of this elder man tallied with that of the clergyman who had been so communicative to Mrs. Brown.

“Thank you, my friend,” said Mr. Williams; “I am much obliged to you. What is your name?”

“Johnson, sir,” replied the policeman.

“I shall not forget it,” continued Mr. Williams. “I may want you one of these days. Good morning.”

“At your service, sir,” said the policeman, saluting.

“Now, pa, what do you think of it all?” asked Polly, as they retraced their steps. “Don’t you think that I am right?”

“Heaven knows, my darling!” answered her father. “It seems clear that Lottie is gone off with the Coulters; why she went is another

matter. We must go back to Greek Street, my pet; we must find out all we can from that Mrs. Brown. Oh! those Coulters," muttered Mr. Williams, grinding his teeth, "a bitter debt I have to settle with them! Pray, my darling child—pray that the day of settlement may be near at hand."

CHAPTER XI.

AN EXPLANATION.

THE result of Mr. Williams' interview with Mrs. Brown was the confirmation of his suspicion that it was the younger Coulter with whom his daughter had fled. In vain he racked his brains to discover a probable reason for that flight; he could find none. That there was some dark conspiracy against his daughter he felt convinced, but of the nature of that conspiracy he could form no idea. The fact of the elder Coulter's having assumed the disguise of a clergyman caused him additional alarm. Was it possible, he asked himself, that his daughter could have been lured into a false marriage? What could the object of the Coulters be in seeking the ruin of Lottie? Had they dis-

covered the existence of a will in her favour ? Supposing that they were unable to obtain possession of it, they would have sought to secure her fortune by valid marriage with her. Why, then, this particular disguise ? Then, again, how was it possible that Lottie could have been abducted against her will ? Her departure had been witnessed by many people ; surely, had that departure been involuntary, she would have given some sign that she was acting under compulsion ! Mr. Williams was thoroughly perplexed, and in his perplexity he again sought the advice of the detectives of Scotland Yard, with one of whom he was acquainted. He unfolded to this detective the discoveries that he had made since his last visit to Scotland Yard. The man listened with much interest to his revelations. When Mr. Williams had concluded his story, the detective proceeded to comment upon it.

“ It seems to have been a cleverly-arranged affair, but I don’t see what you can do in the case yet awhile. These are the points : your daughter may or may not be entitled to that fortune—for my own part, I can pronounce no

opinion on that ; these people may have learnt that she is entitled to it—that would account for their carrying her off. Now, assuming that she is entitled to the fortune, and that they have carried her off in order that they may become possessed of it, what then ? Have you the least reason to suppose that they carried her off against her will ? From what you say, I cannot see that you have.”

“ You must take into account the character of these Coulters,” said Mr. Williams. “ They are, I believe, thoroughly unscrupulous. You must also remember that there isn’t the least evidence to show that my daughter ever saw either of them before the day upon which she went away with them.”

“ That is why I think the affair cleverly arranged,” explained the detective. “ I don’t want to be hard on the girl, but I should say most decidedly that she did know them before that day. She didn’t seem afraid of them, did she ?”

“ No,” answered Mr. Williams.

“ Depend upon it, they had some private understanding unknown to you. Now, let us

suppose that they got her away against her will. Would she, in that case, have gone off to France so cheerfully? There were hundreds of people at the station who would have assisted her, if she had wanted help."

"It is possible that we were mistaken in thinking that it was she who went to France," suggested Mr. Williams.

"I don't think so," replied the detective. "You were sure at the time that it was her, weren't you?"

"Yes, I thought so then; but I had no idea that these Coulters were mixed up in the case."

"That doesn't alter matters at all. No, the girl, who is more than sixteen years old, went away of her own free will, and you are powerless to help yourself. You might make inquiries in France—if you like, I'll do it for you, but it will be expensive. Meanwhile, I shall try to find out about these fellows. What I can do shall be done, and we must hope that the girl is fairly married."

"Here, then, is the address of the Coulters," said Mr. Williams, writing it upon a slip of paper. "I am uncommonly obliged to you,

and I hope that one day I shall be able to prove it."

"Oh! don't mention that," begged the detective. "I owe you a good turn, so, if I can help you in this case, we shall be quits."

Three years before, Mr. Williams, returning to his rooms at midnight, had stumbled over the body of this detective, who had been beaten into senselessness by a gang of ruffians who had encountered and attacked him. Mr. Williams, aided by a passer-by, had conveyed the wounded man to his rooms, and had there carefully tended him, a service which the detective had not forgotten.

"Do you advise me, then," said Mr. Williams, rising to depart, "to make no great stir in the matter at present?"

"Yes," answered the detective. "Should you find out anything further, come to me. Shall I make inquiries in Paris for you?"

"Yes, if you will be so good. I will reimburse you for any expenses that you may incur. Good day."

"Good day; and don't make yourself uneasy

about the matter. I should think that the girl is married right enough."

It was less difficult for the detective to advise Mr. Williams not to feel uneasy about his daughter than for that gentleman to follow his advice. His hatred of the Coulters, to whom he, not unjustly, attributed the gravest of his misfortunes, was a most bitter hatred, and the mere thought that Lottie might have been in collusion with them was intolerable to him. Had he not informed her of the wrongs that he had sustained at the hands of Mrs. Coulter? Was it possible that she could be forgetful of those wrongs? No, such a thing could hardly be. There was another hypothesis; they might have made her acquaintance under an assumed name. But then how could he acquit Lottie of treachery? There was a mystery in the case that he could not fathom. He must patiently await the moment that should reveal that mystery.

The morning after his interview with the detective, Mr. Williams, accompanied by Polly, paid another visit to Mrs. Martin, to whom he communicated his discovery that Mr. John

Smith and the younger Coulter were one and the same person. This communication caused the old lady great distress, for she reproached herself with being the cause of all the present unhappiness. Polly endeavoured to console her, but she turned a deaf ear to the voice of consolation.

"No, my dear," she exclaimed, in answer to that young lady's assurance that she could by no means be accused of culpability, "I shall never forgive myself for not having acquainted your father with that man's visit. Had I told him of it, then this could never have come to pass."

"Lamentation can do no good, Mrs. Martin," put in Mr. Williams. "Pray forget that you are at all to blame in the matter. It is very unfortunate that you did not tell me, but, at the same time, it is possible that, even had you told me, we should have been unable to prevent what has happened."

This assertion, which implied a suspicion against Lottie, brought down a storm of reproaches from Polly upon his head.

"Do not tell me that that dear girl can be to blame," said Mrs. Martin, assenting to Polly's

emphatic declaration that her sister could not be suspected of any participation in the plot. "No, I am convinced that she is an innocent victim."

"Well, let us say that she is," said Mr. Williams. "I trust with all my soul that such may be the case. I have pointed out to you the difficulties in the matter. We can do nothing but wait and see what happens. The police believe that she has gone abroad."

"Then let us go after her," cried Polly.

"My own precious pet," said her father, "you do not take into consideration the fact that travelling is expensive. I am not rich enough to be able to go abroad. Even if we were to go to Paris, whither it is supposed that she has gone, there is a chance that we should be unable to effect anything. She may not be in France, my sweet Polly."

"But we could make inquiries, pa," persisted Polly.

"The police will do that for us, my love," answered her father. "We must be patient, my pet."

"It's all very well to talk of patience," cried

Polly ; "but how can I be patient when Lottie is in danger?"

"Are you sure that the police will make all possible inquiries ?" asked Mrs. Martin.

"Yes," replied Mr. Williams ; "at least, in Paris they will. I grieve to say that I cannot afford to institute any very wide search for her. I am too poor for that."

"But such a search should be made," urged Mrs. Martin. "If money is necessary, I will undertake to find it."

Mr. Williams looked at Mrs. Martin suspiciously.

"You are not rich, Mrs. Martin," he said. "I could not think of taking your money. If you had any money of Lottie's it would be a different matter; unfortunately, though, you have not."

Mrs. Martin interpreted his suspicious glance correctly.

"I will be frank with you, Mr. Williams," she replied ; "I have some money of dear Lottie's."

"Ah!" muttered Mr. Williams, "I thought that you had."

"You must not misjudge me," continued the

old lady. "Lottie knows exactly how much money of hers I have."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Mr. Williams. "Then I have been deceived by her in this matter too."

"No, you've not, pa!" exclaimed Polly; "or if you have, it was all for your good. Lottie told me all about it, and I agreed with her that it was better that Mrs. Martin should keep it for her than that you should."

"My dearest child," protested Mr. Williams, with the look of a deeply-wronged man, "is it possible that you can think ill of your father? Oh! this is too—too much!"

"No, it ain't," denied Polly; "for if you——"

"My beloved one," blandly observed Mr. Williams, "you may contradict your father if you like. Yes, I shall strive to bear contradiction; but let me beg you to contradict me in ladylike terms. Say rather, my sweetest pet, 'Indeed, dearest papa, I differ from you.' Ain't is neither grammatical nor ladylike, is it, my dear Mrs. Martin?"

"Well, pa," continued Polly, "it is not, if you like that better. You know, pa, that I don't think ill of you. I think that you are the best

and dearest pa in the world ; but you know, dear, that you are imprudent. If Mrs. Martin had given you all Lottie's money, the chances are that you would have lost it on some horse, as you did the two hundred pounds."

"But, darling child, I have not lost the two hundred pounds," observed her father.

"But you will, 'pa, so it's much the same thing."

"I confess, Mr. Williams," said Mrs. Martin, "that it was the fear that you might lose the dear girl's money in this way that induced me to conceal the fact of my having it from you. Mr. Wilson seldom saw me without deplored your fatal infatuation for gambling."

"I presume, my dear Mrs. Martin," said Mr. Williams, with a polite bow, "that you as invariably deplored this infatuation, as you are pleased to term it, to him."

"As your daughter was so dear to me, could I help regretting that you should throw away your money in this disgrace—I mean distressing —manner?"

"I feel deeply indebted to you for the kind interest that you have taken in my affairs," an-

swered Mr. Williams. "May I inquire the amount of money belonging to my daughter, that you have in your possession?"

"I must decline to tell you," replied Mrs. Martin. "If money is needed for the prosecution of the search for this dear girl, I shall advance it to you."

"Really, my dear madam," declared Mr. Williams, with a bland smile, "your prudence astonishes me. Doubtless so prudent a lady as yourself has managed to secure herself against the arrows of ungrateful fortune."

"I do not understand your meaning," said Mrs. Martin.

"Dear me, I am vague. Pardon my vagueness, my dear madam. I merely wished to compliment you upon your prudence. I stated my belief that, after having once experienced the bitterness of poverty——"

"Don't remind me of that," cried Mrs. Martin. "Who impoverished me?"

"Ah! who indeed?" asked Mr. Williams, in his kindest manner. "But I shall not criticise the conduct of your husband—no, far from me be any criticism of that. I expressed my be-

lief, my dear madam, that in the course of the twelve years during which you were kind enough to undertake the management of my daughter's education, and pecuniary affairs, you must have been able to secure yourself against any unpleasant little eventualities. I trust that my belief is a correct one."

"Do you wish to insult me?" exclaimed Mrs. Martin.

"My dear madam," protested Mr. Williams, "can you suspect me of being capable of such a thing? Will you for ever misjudge me?"

"Your words convey an insult," said Mrs. Martin. "for my own honour I must answer them. You ruined my husband, but, for the sake of your wife and children, I forgave you. Your daughter was with me for twelve years, and I loved her as if she had been my own child. I strove to do my duty by her, and I endeavoured to save all that I could for her. Had I been able to anticipate events, I should have saved more; as it is, I saved what I could. You know what my private income is—I never spared it. No, I had no thought for myself. I spent all my own income, that I might save for

her as much as I could from the allowance that her uncle made me for her."

"My dear Mrs. Martin," interrupted Mr. Williams, "I have no wish—"

"Hear me out!" continued the old lady, excitedly. "Mr. Wilson furnished this house, and settled the lease and furniture upon me. The lease expires at Midsummer. I shall then quit the house, for my means will not enable me to continue to live here; I shall sell the furniture, and shall devote the proceeds to Lottie; my own little income will keep me. And you accuse me of having plundered Lottie—the one being in this world whom I love."

"I beg your pardon most humbly for any suspicion that my words may have conveyed to your mind," said Mr. Williams, feeling convinced that Mrs. Martin had told him the truth. "I had no wish to accuse you of any such thing. I merely hoped that the sad events of the past few months would not affect you—I mean in the way of comforts, which you, as an invalid, require. It would add to my grief to think that one for whom I have so sincere a respect

should in any way suffer from my own calamities."

Mrs. Martin was but half appeased by this ingenious evasion. She dried her eyes and resumed :

" Whilst I have a roof over my head, Lottie shall never lack a home, if she will come to me. This terrible event has nearly killed me. And to think that I am the cause——" Here the old lady broke down.

" Do not distress yourself, dear Mrs. Martin," begged Polly, caressing her. " Indeed you are not the cause. We know how you love Lottie. Now do not cry! Everything will come right soon, and then we shall all be happy again."

" I pray so," sobbed Mrs. Martin.

" I feel deeply touched by your love for my daughter," said Mr. Williams. " I hope that she will prove worthy of your love. Do not yield to grief, my dear madam, for grief cannot aid us in our endeavours to solve this mystery. Let us make up our minds to bear this blow with calmness, and to labour to ascertain the truth of the matter. That the whole

affair is a plot, with which old Wilson's money is in some way connected, I am convinced. We must endeavour to trace the connection. Be calm, Mrs. Martin, and answer me ; are you convinced that Lottie had no opportunity of becoming acquainted with the Coulters when she was with you ?"

" I am certain of it," declared Mrs. Martin.

" And Polly is equally convinced that she could not have formed their acquaintance whilst she was with us ; are you not, my own precious one ?"

" Yes, positive," affirmed Polly.

" Then, Mrs. Martin, you see the great difficulty there is in the case. Why should she have gone off with them ? They could hardly have persuaded her to do so in a single interview—an interview that lasted less than five minutes, according to my informants. It is a bitter blow to me to think that she should have been in league with them."

" You mustn't think that she was, pa !" cried Polly.

" She cannot have been in league with them," said Mrs. Martin.

"The police feel convinced that she was," said Mr. Williams.

"Then they know nothing about it," declared Polly. "They are a set of duffers to think so."

"Be careful, sweetest darling," remonstrated her father. "'Duffers' is not an elegant word. They argue thus, Mrs. Martin: Why should Lottie have refused to go out with Polly and me upon that fatal morning? Does not the fact of her departing with those two men, almost immediately upon their entering the house, seem to show that she was prepared to go away with them? Why did she leave no reason for her departure behind her, when opportunity of doing so was so easy? These are the three points against her."

"I grant that, to one who does not know Lottie as I know her, these three points may seem full of suspicion," replied Mrs. Martin; "but, knowing her as I do, I have not the slightest hesitation in saying that her pure mind could never have harboured an evil thought. She is the purest and most simple-minded girl in the world. It is utterly impos-

sible that she could have been guilty of such a violation of love and virtue as you seem to suspect her of."

"Thank you, dear Mrs. Martin," exclaimed Polly. "You, at least, do not misjudge Lottie."

"Dearest child," said her father, "why do you persist in thinking that I wish to misjudge your sister? Is there anybody who can be more interested in proving her innocence than I am?"

"You judge her from facts," observed Mrs. Martin; "you do not take her character sufficiently into account. Were you to do so, you would perceive how incompatible with her character is the commission of such a crime as this."

"My dear Mrs. Martin," replied Mr. Williams, "what else have I to form a judgment from? May I ask if you can suggest any probable cause for her disappearance, other than that to which these same facts point?"

"I cannot," owned Mrs. Martin; "but that is no reason why I should condemn Lottie. No; I refuse to believe that she is in any way connected with this strange affair, except inasmuch

as she may be a victim to some wicked plot against her."

"Pa, dear," exclaimed Polly, solemnly, "I have it; I see it all!"

"What does my darling child see?" asked her father.

"Lottie has been mesmerised! Yes, pa, don't smile; some mesmeriser has charmed her, and taken her away whilst she was under the influence of the charm. That must be it!"

"Can this be possible?" asked Mrs. Martin, anxiously.

"Hardly, I think," answered Mr. Williams. "I am not acquainted with the science of mesmerism, but to me it seems well-nigh impossible that a mesmerist could have exerted his influence over her in the short space of time that elapsed between the coming and going of these two men."

"But, pa," urged Polly, "don't you remember the wonderful manner in which that mesmeriser, who we went to see——"

"Whom we went to see, my darling," said her father, correcting her.

said Mrs. Martin, rising and going to her desk.
“ You will, of course, remember that this money
is dear Lottie’s, and be careful of it.”

“ Can you doubt that I shall ?” asked Mr. Williams.

The old lady wrote out a cheque for a hundred pounds and gave it to Mr. Williams, who carefully placed it in his pocket-book.

“ Come, my darling child,” said he to Polly, “ let us lose no time. I shall visit my friend the detective again, at once. You may depend upon every exertion being made to discover the fugitives, Mrs. Martin. I had misjudged you, my dear madam. I confess my crime; can you pardon it ?”

Mrs. Martin assured him of her forgiveness, and after a more cordial salutation than generally passed between them, Mr. Williams took his leave of her.

“ Was I not sure, darling one ?” he asked Polly, as they were walking down the street, “ was I not positive that that old woman had more money of Lottie’s ? Well, she seems to have behaved very fairly, after all. I confess

that I wronged her by my suspicions. Never mind, I will forgive her everything. Try to walk elegantly, my sweet pet."

CHAPTER XII.

IN BAD COMPANY.

TWO months passed away without bringing any tidings of Lottie to those who were so deeply interested in her fate. The police had not been inactive in their search for her, but the false clue which they had followed up had thrown them off the true scent. The lady and gentleman, who had been mistaken for Lottie and the companion of her flight, had been traced from Paris to Bordeaux, whence they had sailed for the Brazils. The police were baffled. What more could they do in the matter? It only remained for them to await information from their agents in Brazil, that might throw some light upon the identity of the suspected couple.

The Coulters, too, were not to be traced.

They were supposed to have quitted London before the time of Lottie's disappearance, but whither they had gone, no one could say. The servants at Langstone House had been put upon board wages, and orders had been left that all letters which might come for Mrs. Coulter and her sons should be forwarded to their lawyer. Their lawyer professed ignorance of the whereabouts of his clients, and he declared his belief that they had gone abroad. The two months passed without bringing the slightest relief to those who were sorrowing over the mystery in which was enveloped the departure of the missing girl.

And Lottie?—how had it fared with her in Wiltshire, during those sad months? A merciful Providence had been kind to her. She knew not of the grief that her absence was causing to those whom she had loved so dearly. The wind had been tempered to the shorn lamb. The powerful drug that was to have been the means of her ruin had proved her saviour. For long Lottie had lain in a trance; for so long that her persecutors had feared that she would never awaken from it. Life had re-

turned to her, but with its return came not back the gift of thought. To her the past was as a blank.

She was not unhappy. To her was granted many a sweet pleasure. She would wander about the fields and lanes, gazing, with all the delight of a young child, at some wonder of Nature starting into life at the bidding of the gentle Spring wind. For her there was a pleasure in watching the bright bubbles that chased each other adown the stony brook, which ran through the little wood behind the house. For her there was a happiness in listening to the murmur of the noisy waters ; for her the birds sang their songs in words fraught with a deep meaning. Unthinking, save of the present, would she wander along, now pausing to address a few simple words to some leaf or flower, now to take from her bosom something that she loved to wear next her heart. She would sit down and spread open the pages of her lover's letter ; she would smooth each crumpled sheet ; she would gaze upon them fondly but wonderingly. Why she treasured that letter she knew not, but to her it was very

dear. Then she would fold up each sheet carefully, and, kissing them, would replace them tenderly in the worn envelope, and again return the letter to her bosom ; then rising, would wander onwards, singing to herself in strange words.

The Coulters were very kind to Lottie. By their kindness they strove to make some amends to her for the fearful calamity in which their designs had involved her. The marriage of Fred Coulter with Lottie was not to be thought of now—for the present, at all events. He had signified his willingness to carry out his part of the plot, and marry her in spite of her affliction, but to this his brother had refused to consent, and in his refusal he was supported by his mother.

Lottie's beauty and the gentleness of her nature had touched Ralph Coulter's heart, and he had determined that, in the event of her recovering her right senses, his brother should not carry off such a prize from him, without his making an effort to secure it for himself. Fred was not altogether unsuspicuous of his brother's designs, and this had led to a certain coolness

between the two men. Their mother was deeply grieved and shocked at the course of events, and it was with much difficulty that her sons had prevented her from revealing the plot, upon which she felt that there was a curse.

When two months had elapsed without bringing any sign of Lottie's recovery, the Coulters began to fear that her derangement might be permanent. Hitherto they had not invoked the assistance of any medical man, for they dreaded the detection of their crime. The neighbourhood knew of them as being a retired family, who, for the sake of the health of the poor young lady, as they termed Lottie, had sought the fine air and retirement of that out-of-the-way part of Wiltshire. They had assumed the name of Jones. Were they to call in the services of a doctor, it might lead to the discovery that this name was an *alias*, and that discovery might lead to something worse. No, they could not afford to run so great a risk. And yet something must be done, and that soon, to ascertain what prospect there was of Lottie's regaining her senses. To discuss this, Mrs.

Coulter and her sons were sitting in earnest deliberation. The hour was past midnight; Fred was speaking.

"By this time they must have given up all hopes of finding the girl. We have seen no advertisement referring to her in the *Times*. Surely, if they had cared much for her, they would have advertised for her."

"I don't know so much about that," said Ralph. "It may be that they are keeping quiet to throw us off our guard. That man Serrall is an artful one, is he not, mother?"

"Yes, my dear Ralph," answered Mrs. Coulter, "a most wicked and designing man."

"But nothing has turned up," persisted Fred. "If anything of importance had happened, we must have heard from Smith."

"Is it possible, dear Fred," asked his mother, "that his letters to us may have miscarried?"

"I don't think so, Mater. Do you, Ralph?"

"Oh, no!" replied his brother. "If Smith had anything of importance to tell us, he would have written to me at my club, as I requested him to do, and the club porter would have forwarded the letter to me at the Gloucester

Hotel. One letter may have miscarried, but it is impossible that many can have done so. Smith would have written many, had there been need."

"Perhaps so," sighed Mrs. Coulter. "This state of suspense is very distressing to me, though. I would that we might know the worst at once. Anything would be preferable to this life of constant anxiety."

"You're always anxious about something, Mater," said Fred.

"Yes," put in Ralph, "if you haven't a trouble, you make one. 'Pon my soul, I never knew such a woman! We ought to rejoice that we have not heard from Smith, for if he had written to us, it could only have been to tell us that something unpleasant had happened. Instead of rejoicing, you seem to be downright sorry that matters have gone on so smoothly."

"I dread the future, dear Ralph," answered his mother. "I feel convinced that there is some terrible blow impending over our heads. That poor girl, too—oh! it was an evil hour in which I consented to aid you in carrying her off!"

"Don't give way to gloomy thoughts, Mater," begged her younger son. "You cannot be sorer than I am for the girl's misfortune. Haven't we done all that we can for her? Don't we try to humour her in every way? Tell me anything more that I can do than I have already done."

"I do not see that you need make such a fuss about the matter," said Ralph. "One of these days the girl will be all right again. I should like to have the opinion of some clever doctor, though; but how on earth we are to manage that without running considerable risk, I don't see."

"We might take her abroad," suggested Fred.

"Yes, that seems perfectly feasible," replied his brother.

"But, my dear boys," asked their mother, "in the event of a doctor pronouncing the girl incurable, what must we do?"

"A thing of this kind isn't incurable," answered Ralph. "No, sooner or later she will get well again. She must be treated very carefully, though. I do not think that Fred should

press his suit, for the girl seems to have conceived a dislike for him."

"Perhaps you think that she likes you better," exclaimed Fred.

"I say nothing about that," replied Ralph. "What I mean is, that you frightened her once, and, in all probability, brought on this affair. Supposing that she gets over it, I do not think that you should run the risk of bringing on a return of the malady."

"Don't you, indeed?" sneered Fred. "You think, then, that I should give up all idea of marrying her, do you?"

"Exactly so," answered his brother.

"In which case, I suppose that you would have no objection to marrying her yourself—am I right?"

"Do not be foolish, Fred," advised Ralph. "I promised to aid you in this matter, for the furtherance of our welfare. It is solely from consideration of our welfare that I think that you should abandon your intention of marrying her."

"How kind and considerate you are!" replied his brother, sarcastically. "What a pity for

you it is that I cannot see the matter as you see it!"

"Be persuaded by dear Ralph," advised Mrs. Coulter. "I am sure that he is counselling you for the best."

"Oh! of course, Mater; take his part, by all means," exclaimed Fred. "Do you wish Ralph to marry the girl?"

"I said nothing about my marrying her," retorted Ralph. "I only stated my belief that it would be a cruel thing for you to drive her out of her mind a second time, as doubtless you would do, were you to force your proposals on her."

"I swear, Ralph, that you would provoke a saint!" protested Fred, angrily. "Do you mean to say that I drove the girl out of her senses? Do you accuse me of that?"

"You had something to do with it," answered his brother.

"I tell you what it is, Ralph," cried Fred, "I'll be hanged if you shall accuse me of this."

A contemptuous shrug of the shoulders was his brother's only answer. It stung the young man into fury. Trembling with anger, he sprang

out of his chair. Ralph did not move; he knew the superiority of his own strength over that of his brother, so he had no fear of his brother's violence.

"You say that I am the cause of her illness," exclaimed Fred, his face livid with rage. "It's a lie! I had nothing to do with it. You are the cause of it; yes, you alone are to blame. You over-drugged her, that is what did it. You lie when you accuse me of having injured her."

Ralph's dark brow contracted itself into a frown, but he made no reply to the accusation of his brother.

"Yes," resumed Fred, still more excitedly, "you are the sole person who is to blame. It is a mercy that you did not murder her, as you murdered uncle!"

Now Ralph's anger could contain itself no longer. With a loud oath he sprang from his chair. There would have been a desperate encounter between the brothers, had not their mother rushed between them.

"Are you mad?" she cried. "Some one may overhear you. For heaven's sake don't give way to passion! You do not seek to ruin us,

do you? Be calm, my dear boys, let me implore you to be calm. Think of what must happen should the servants hear you. Do not be foolish, my dearest boys."

Mrs. Coulter's words recalled her sons to a sense of their position. Ralph restrained the impulse that had prompted him to wreak a bitter vengeance upon his brother. In a suppressed tone he answered—

"You are right, mother; but Fred shall beg my pardon for what he has said, or I'll——"

"Yes, yes," interrupted his mother, eagerly, "he will beg your pardon—won't you, dearest boy?"

"Yes, Mater," replied Fred, who saw that his anger had carried him too far. "I beg your pardon, Ralph, for what I said. I think that you should beg mine, too, for having accused me of driving the girl out of her mind."

"I beg your pardon, if I did so," answered Ralph. "I had no intention of accusing you of any such thing."

Peace was, therefore, re-established between the brothers. Mrs. Coulter opened the door of the room, and satisfied herself that the alterca-

tion had not been overheard by any inquisitive servant; and then, re-closing the door softly, returned, and again seated herself at the table.

“Now, my dear boys,” she said, “let us seriously consider the question of what is to be done with this girl.”

“We must manage to get good medical advice for her,” answered Ralph. “How to obtain it I do not know, unless we take her abroad. It will not do to go to London.”

“And supposing that the doctors should declare that she can never recover, what then? Might we not send her back to her father? Would there be danger in that?” asked Mrs. Coulter.

“Yes, very great danger,” replied Ralph. “It is my belief that we have heard nothing about the will in consequence of the girl’s being missing. This quiet is very suspicious. Do you not think so, Fred?” he added, in conciliatory tones.

“Yes,” answered his brother. “It looks as if a storm were brewing.”

“We must labour to guard against failure now,” continued Ralph. “Failure to us implies

utter ruin. We must find out what chance there is of the girl's recovery; and should we come to the conclusion that her senses are irrevocably gone, then we must put her somewhere where she will be well taken care of."

"Not in an asylum, dear Ralph," protested his mother.

"Oh! no," declared Ralph, "certainly not. We should have no difficulty in finding a suitable place for her. I would not have her treated unkindly—no, not for any consideration."

"But you think that she will recover, do you not, dear Ralph?" asked his mother, anxiously.

"Yes, mother," answered her son. "I have heard of many cases in which people have recovered from similar maladies, brought on by sudden shocks."

"It was not altogether a shock that brought this on," observed Fred. "I fancy that the drug had something to do with it."

"Ah! yes," said Mrs. Coulter. "I was so afraid of your using a drug. You deceived me, my dear boys. I should never have consented to your drugging her."

“The mischief is done, mother,” said Ralph. “Whatever caused it, the girl is out of her mind now. It remains for us to do what we can to cure her. It is necessary that we should consult some doctor in the case. So far we are agreed, are we not?”

“Yes,” assented his listeners.

“Well, then, the next thing to be settled is, what doctor shall we consult? Where shall we take the girl to?”

“Are there not good doctors to be found in the country?” asked Mrs. Coulter. “Could we not consult them without going up to London?”

“No, mother,” replied Ralph. “They would be sure to advise us to go to London. No, I do not think it advisable that we should consult any English doctor. We have too much at stake to run any risk.”

“Well, then, my dear boy, let us decide upon going abroad,” said his mother.

“How do you propose to get out of England, Ralph?” asked Fred.

“I have not thought of that,” answered his brother. “There is likely to be some difficulty

in the matter. It will not do for us to take the girl to London; and there is just the chance that the police are watching the different ports."

"Do you think so, after this lapse of time?" asked Fred.

"I cannot say that they are actually doing so," replied Ralph. "There is a chance that such may be the case; and we must provide against it."

"What do you say, then, to my original scheme of buying a yacht, and going for a cruise in her?"

"I am such a bad sailor, my dear Fred," observed Mrs. Coulter.

"Oh! you'd soon get your sea-legs, Mater," said Fred. "Believe me that you would enjoy it immensely. We might go down to the Mediterranean, and have no end of fun."

"No, not the Mediterranean," cried Mrs. Coulter. "I knew some people who went for a yachting cruise there—they were caught in a storm, and all were drowned. It is a most dangerous place, I believe. No, I could not go there."

“ Well, then, Mater, I tell you what we may do. We can go out to Norway—yes, that is our best plan, is it not, Ralph? We might go to Hamburg, or Copenhagen, for medical advice, first. There are first-rate doctors in either place. Then we should get out to Norway just in time for the fishing.”

“ But is there no danger?” inquired Mrs. Coulter, nervously. “ Are there not malströms along the coast?”

“ No, Mater,” said her younger son, reassuringly. “ Of all places in the world, the coast of Norway is the best for one who is a timid sailor. There is no sea-sickness possible there.”

“ How is that, my dear Fred?”

“ A chain of islands stretches along the coast, and between these islands and the mainland is a smooth channel, where the water is never rough, blow it ever so hard.”

“ I think your idea an excellent one, Fred,” said his brother. “ There is only one reason against it—that is the expense.”

“ The expense will be insignificant,” declared Fred. “ We ought to be able to buy a suitable yacht for four or five hundred pounds.”

"I should doubt that," replied his brother.

"I cut a slip out of a Gloucester paper to-day. Stop a minute, I have it in my pocket—yes, here it is. What do you think of this?" And Fred read aloud the following advertisement:—"For sale, the *Callista*, 50 ton yacht (cutter), in first-class order. Built of steel by the Milwall Iron Company, in 1863. Hull perfectly sound. Sails (by Lapthorne) new last season, scarcely used. Lead ballast. Lofty cabins. Superior accommodation. Is fitted with Leach's patent removable propellers, and can steam six to seven miles an hour. Now lying at Bristol. To be sold in consequence of owner having purchased larger vessel. Lowest price, £600. Apply to ——'"

"That sounds well," observed Ralph, as his brother finished reading the advertisement. "For a vessel of that description, I think that we could afford to give £600 pounds. I was making out accounts to-day. It appears that the Mater and I together have a balance of about six hundred pounds at the bank. Have you any idea as to what your balance may be, Fred?"

"A little under three hundred pounds, I should say."

"Then I think we can manage it, for quarter-day is at hand. At all events, we can go and have a look at this yacht to-morrow. It seems ridiculously cheap."

"Yes, doesn't it?" said his brother. "It seems to me that it is the very thing we want. We could hardly get a simple sailing-yacht up some of the Fiords—the Sogne Fiord, for instance."

"Then, mother," said Ralph, "are we agreed upon this point, that, if this yacht should turn out to be as good as the advertisement declares it to be, we are to buy it?"

"I do not know, my dearest boy," said his mother, doubtfully; "are you positive that there is no danger?"

"Certain, mother. The trip will do you all the good in the world, besides. Then, again, it may benefit this poor girl."

"Yes," chimed in Fred. "I should not wonder at its effecting a perfect cure for her."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Coulter; "if I thought that——"

"At all events," said Ralph, interrupting her, "it will help us out of our difficulties. There will be but little danger of discovery when we are abroad. It would be far better for us that she should return to her right mind abroad rather than in England."

"And should she recover, dear Ralph, what do you propose to do?"

"Well, mother, that depends. It seems to me, though, that our best plan will be to tell her that her father and sister are dead, and that you are taking care of her, out of charity."

"But that might drive her mad again," objected Mrs. Coulter.

"We must break it to her gently," said Ralph. "We must be very kind to her, and humour her in every way. In time she will overcome her sorrow; then we can decide upon what is to be done."

"Remember that I do not give her up!" exclaimed Fred.

"Yes, I bear that in mind," answered his brother; "but you must say nothing to her on that subject until she is quite well again."

"It would simplify matters if I were to marry her at once."

"We could find no clergyman willing to perform the ceremony whilst she is out of her mind. No, that would never do. You must bide your time patiently. Now we have arranged everything; it is late, so let us go to bed."

The two wished each other good night, and sought their different rooms.

The next day Ralph and his brother went to London. They were well satisfied with the house and agreed to become its purchasers at no great sum, a no advertisement. A fortnight we had a quiet & a thoroughly see-going sum. I had been sent round the coast to buy up old boxes of feathers and their help was much required.

On a very bright morning they started out and I joined them, directed by a necessary letter to follow you readily up the Channel.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MUTINY.

A STORM was brewing in St. Kenelm's College. Discontent was rife in that seat of learning. An injustice had been perpetrated towards the undergraduate members of the college, and the injured commoners, scholars and exhibitioners, had resolved to register a forcible protest against it. Were the sacred traditions of the past to be held as nought ? Was a privilege which the undergraduates of St. Kenelm's had enjoyed for nobody knows how many years to be abolished at the arbitrary nod of Dondon ? No, it should not be permitted without protest. The college must combine to resist an encroachment upon its rights. Boating men, cricketing men, shooting men, and reading men—all must join,

hand in hand, to withstand the meditated wrong.

The Reverend Mr. Frumble was at the bottom of it all. He was in high spirits. For years he had not been so glad at heart. He was restless in his glee, and trotted backwards and forwards from Common-room to his own chambers, with a briskness and lightness of foot that excited the wonder of all who beheld him. On his face there was a simper of intense pleasure, which developed into a broad grin of delight when he passed any of the junior members of the college, and noticed the black looks with which they regarded him. How self-satisfied he felt! His day of vengeance had come at last! Too long had he been derided and held at nought by the giddy youth. His lecture-room, so well filled at the beginning of term, had been deserted before term was half over; his catechetics—a series of questions which he loved to affix to the chapel door on Sundays, and to expound in his sermon, in the vain expectation that men would write short essays upon them, and take such essays to him for examination—these had been left unanswered, save by a few Freshmen,

to whom the frown of Frumble was still a thing of terror; or, horror of horrors! had been torn down from the chapel door before even the Freshmen could copy them out. Men no longer cared to get up at seven o'clock in the morning to go to chapel, nor could his threats induce them to forego the error of their ways. Truly he had been badly treated. There was Valentine's day, too, to be remembered—oh, yes, he had not forgotten it. But his turn had come at last; his vengeance should be felt.

He was trotting across Quad to Common-room, when he encountered Haller. The smile fled from the face of the latter as he recognised his ancient enemy. He would have passed him by without notice, had not the Reverend Mr. Frumble addressed him.

“Tut-tut-tay, Mr. Haller,” cried the tutor, “I sent for you this tut-tut-tum morning. Why did you not come to me?”

“I did not get your message,” answered Haller. There was good reason why he should not have received it; he had led the crafty messenger a rare dance after him, and had succeeded in evading him until one o'clock, after

which hour, according to college etiquette, the messenger forbore to "draw" delinquents.

"That is tut-tut-tay strange, Mr. Haller—it is tut-tut-tum very strange. I sent for you yesterday, tut-tut-too, Mr. Haller."

"I did not get your message, sir," repeated Haller.

"Come tut-tut-to me at nine o'clock tut-tut-to-night, then, Mr. Haller," stuttered the Reverend Mr. Frumble.

"To-night, sir!" cried Haller—"I have an engagement to-night; may I see you to-morrow morning instead?"

"A tut-tut-tay engagement, did you say, Mr. Haller?" asked the tutor. "Is it with the tut-tut-tay master, or any of the tut-tut-tum authorities, may I ask?"

"No, it is with some friends," answered Haller.

"Some friends, Mr. Haller!" cried the tutor, in astonishment. "Do you wish to sacrifice my tut-tut-tum convenience to that of your tut-tut-tum friends? Is that your tut-tut-tay wish?"

"I supposed, sir, that you wished to see me

about some matter of trivial importance," said Haller, boldly.

"Tut-tut-tay trivial, did you say, Mr. Haller? It is not tut-tut-trivial; it is tut-tut-tum important. It is about chapel. You have not——"

"Oh, about chapel!" cried Haller, interrupting him. "No, I was not there this morning. I overslept myself, I am sorry to say."

"Nor yesterday!" exclaimed the tutor. "I must tut-tut-tay——"

"Oh, yesterday!" said Haller, again interrupting him—"I was indisposed yesterday morning. I did not write to you, for I thought that you must be busy. I beg your pardon; I shall try to be more regular in future, sir."

"Tut-tut-tay, Mr. Haller," stuttered the Reverend Mr. Frumble—"tut-tut-tay, sir. Really I——"

"Yes, I am very sorry," declared Haller. "I fear that you will catch cold, sir, standing here; the snow is beginning to thaw, I think. I hope that your boots are thick?"

"Tut-tut-tay, Mr. Haller!" gasped the tutor.

"There goes the dinner-bell!" cried Haller, as the summons to dinner rang out from the

tower. “Excuse me, sir, I shall be late;” and away bolted Mr. Haller across the Quad, leaving the Reverend Mr. Frumble well-nigh speechless with anger.

It was rather a quiet hall that evening. Men conversed over their dinner in low tones, which sank into a whisper when any of the scouts approached them. There was an air of determination visible on all faces—a consciousness that some great event was impending—an event in which seniors and juniors were alike interested.

An act of supposed tyranny on the part of the Dons had thrown St. Kenelm’s into a ferment. The Torpid races were just over, and the St. Kenelm’s boat, of which Haller was stroke, had made three bumps. Great was the rejoicing in the college over these bumps, for they had raised the St. Kenelm’s Torpid to a very high place upon the river. It was the custom of the college to celebrate its aquatic triumphs by a supper in Hall, and application had been made to the authorities for permission to hold the well-earned feast. To the astonishment and dismay of the applicants, this permis-

sion had, for the first time within the memory of St. Kenelmites, been refused. A majority of the Dons, headed by the Reverend Mr. Frumble, had declared the bump-suppers to be conducive neither to the sobriety nor to the well-being of the college, and had announced their determination to veto such banquets for the future. This declaration, which conveyed an insult as well as a wrong, had evoked a very bitter feeling against the Dons, and it was unanimously resolved by the undergraduate members of the college to resent it to the uttermost of their power.

Haller, as stroke of the St. Kenelm's Torpid, felt particularly aggrieved at the decision of the Dons. Accordingly he took counsel with other malcontents as to the best means of satisfying the wounded pride of the college. The weather came to their aid, and a heavy fall of snow suggested to them an easy mode of revenge. They could snow up the chapel. Unfortunately, the Rev. Mr. Frumble, in whom all recognized the author of their wrongs, lived up on the first floor, so they could not snow him up; but was he not Dean of Chapel? Could they inflict a

severer blow upon him than by snowing up his beloved chapel? By doing that they might achieve a double object; their action would be recognized not only as a gentle remonstrance against the violation of their immemorial rights, but also as a mild protest against the existing system of chapels. Was it not a shame, argued the conspirators, that men should be turned out of bed, upon a cold, raw morning, to attend devotions? Was not such a system calculated to render distasteful that which should ever be regarded with veneration? Could a man derive any benefit from prayers to which he was driven *nolens volens*? The conspirators decided that he could not. It was, therefore, they persuaded themselves, as much from the desire to reform an abuse, as from the wish to avenge an injury, that they determined to carry out Haller's suggestion, and snow the chapel up.

Haller, and half-a-dozen other men, whose acquaintance we have already made, were sitting together at a small table in the hall, concerting plans for the execution of their design.

“Yes,” answered Haller, to an observation

made by his friend Hardman, "there seems to be no doubt that it will be a tremendous score over the Dons; but I must say that I should like to do something more to old Frumble. It strikes me that he is getting off rather too easily."

"Yes, it is a duty that we owe to ourselves," observed Salter. "Can't you suggest something, Punch? You were always great at expedients. Cannot your injuries inspire you with some device?"

"I have been thinking it over," said Hill. "What do you say to screwing him up?"

"It's rather an old trick that," objected Taylor. "He might hear us, and then all our plans would be upset."

"We might do it in improved style," replied Hill. "Fumble's landing is very dark, you know. If we were to use long screws, and to cut the heads off after we had driven them in, and then to fill the holes up with wax, it would take a long time to get the old beggar out."

"I have the fate of those T—— men before my eyes," said Taylor. "About half-a-dozen

of them were sent down the other day for screwing their Sammy up."

"I haven't heard the particulars of that," observed Hardman. "How came it to pass that they were found out?"

"Sammy had made himself obnoxious in some way or other," answered Taylor, "and they resolved to screw him up. The proposition to do so was made at some wine, when, I suppose, most of the men were a little 'on.' Of course it was necessary to wait for the lights to be extinguished, and the porter in bed, before they carried out their plans, so they sat up drinking until twelve o'clock, and by that time several of them were 'tight.' Instead of going to work quietly, they went across Quad whooping and making a hullabaloo, and tumbled up Sammy's staircase, roaring with laughter at the idea of the fun before them. Not unnaturally, the noise awoke old Sammy, who got out of bed and went out upon his landing to see what was the matter. The men stumbled upstairs, and there they saw Sammy standing like a ghost.

"'Come 'long, you flers,' hiccupped one of them, 'let's shcrew the old beggar up.'

"‘Why, there ish th’ old beggar,’ hiccupped another man, catching sight of Sammy.

“‘Never mind,’ replied the first, ‘let’s shrew him up. He won’t mind it.’

“Of course Sammy was down upon them at once. The upshot was that half-a-dozen of them were sent down.”

“That reminds me,” said Haller, “that we must be very careful to-night. We must keep an eye upon the Freshmen. It won’t do to have all our plans spoilt by any of them making a noise. We must look after them beforehand.”

“I’ll look after them,” said Murray. “What a joke it will be! No chapel bell in the morning.”

“Not if we’re successful,” observed Smith. “What a pity it is that poor old Tommy isn’t here! Wouldn’t he have enjoyed it?”

“Where is Colner now, Punch?” asked Salter.

“In Norway,” answered Haller.

“Queer time of year to be out there, isn’t it?” continued Salter. “What made him go, Punch?”

"A domestic affliction," replied Haller, briefly.

"Poor fellow!" said Salter. "Well, if he had been here, he couldn't have joined us. He would have been training for the Inter-Varsity."

"True," chimed in Salter. "That deprives us of Longley's services, too. What does he think of this affair, Punch?"

"Don't talk so loud," advised Haller. "There is that Common-room man close behind you. Longley thinks that we ought to succeed."

"Can't you induce him to join us?"

"I don't think it likely—he is in training, you know. Then, again, he lives out of college."

"Oh! we can let him out of a window by means of a blanket—that can easily be managed," said Hill.

"A note for you, Mr. Haller," said a scout, handing a slip of paper to that gentleman.

Haller opened it. It was from Longley, and ran thus:

"Come round to me at half-past seven. I have received two letters—one from Tommy, the other from his mother."

"All right—no answer," said Haller to the

scout. "I have to go somewhere after Hall," he continued, addressing his friends. "Will you fellows kindly see to everything in my absence?"

"Certainly, old man," replied his friends.

"One of you get some long screws, and a good screw-driver, and a pair of nippers."

"I'll do that," volunteered Salter.

"And try to get hold of the key of the chapel. You can do it when the porter is out of his lodge. I shall not be late, for I'm going to Longley's, and he, being in training, must go to bed early."

"Try to induce him to join us," requested Hardman.

"I will; but I fear that he won't come. Now then, let us go, for I see old Frumble looking over towards the scholars' table. Let us get out before grace. Oh! bother it, we're too late. They are standing up."

Everybody in Hall arose for grace. It was a tedious affair, that St. Kenelm's grace—a kind of solo and chorus, executed by a scholar and the Dons, in a language not understood of the people, as a man who was learning the Articles

of the Church of England observed. At last it was over, and the Dons, seizing each his napkin, marched down the Hall in Indian file, and proceeded to Common-room, where it was their wont to take their dessert. After them, those who had finished their dinners quitted the Hall. Haller hurried off to Longley's rooms, anxious to learn the contents of the letters which his friend had received.

Upon Longley's table lay an envelope addressed to Haller. Our friend tore it open, and inside it found a letter written in a lady's handwriting. It was from Mrs. Colner.

“Stickborough, March 20th.

“MY DEAR SIR,

“Knowing that you are one of my son's dearest friends, I have no scruples in writing to you, although I, personally, have not the pleasure of being acquainted with you. Can you give me any news of Herbert? As you are, doubtless, aware, he quitted England two months ago. Since that time neither I, nor any other member of his family, have received news of him. We have advertised in the *Times*, with-

out success. This is most painful and distressing to all of us; the more so as Herbert left England under the influence of a certain foolish resentment against us. He is, I fear, a rash boy, and I dread lest his rashness should have involved him in any danger or difficulty. If you correspond with him, will you beg him to write to me? Will you also assure him that his father's anger against him has subsided? If you could give me Herbert's address, I should be most thankful to you; but should you be unable to do this, I should be truly grateful to you for any news concerning him. I am sure that you require no apology from me for this letter. You can, no doubt, sympathise with a mother's anxiety. Trusting that I shall soon have the pleasure of hearing from you,

“I am, in much distress, sincerely yours,
“MARY COLNER.”

Haller gave a great sigh of relief as he concluded the perusal of this letter. Thank goodness, matters did not seem so very black for Colner, after all. If only he could forget his unfortunate love, everything would turn out

right. But could he forget his love? Ah! that seemed doubtful. "Never mind," thought Haller; "he has plenty of time before him, and time effects wonders."

Colner had narrowly escaped expulsion from St. Kenelm's, for the College authorities, indignant at his presuming to stay down from Oxford without their permission, and still more indignant at receiving no reply to the letters which they wrote to him upon the subject, had actually resolved to strike his name off the books. Fortunately for Colner, Longley heard of this resolve in time. He went to his tutor, Mr. Bills, and explained the matter to him. The warm heart of Mr. Bills pitied the misfortunes of the young man, and found an excuse for his madness, and, through the intercession of Mr. Bills, Colner's name was permitted to remain upon the books of the College. Longley and Haller had arranged everything satisfactorily for the future of their friend—in their own minds, at least. Colner has still nine months before his final opportunity of taking honours in the Schools. They would go to Norway and, by hook or by crook, bring him back to Eng-

land with them. He should read hard for a few months, and take his degree at Christmas; after that they should labour to reconcile his parents to him. Such were their plans. Mrs. Colner's letter simplified matters, and rendered their task less difficult. Haller, who was naturally of a buoyant temperament, no longer saw any great obstacle in the way of Colner's ultimate happiness and welfare.

He was musing over this letter when Longley, who had been dining with a member of the 'Varsity boat, returned to his rooms.

"I could not get away sooner, old man," he apologised to Haller. "You have read Mrs. Colner's letter, I see—satisfactory, isn't it? I did not leave Tommy's letter, because I hadn't finished it. Here it is; it's a long letter. It is addressed to both of us."

Haller eagerly perused the epistle that Longley handed to him. It was, as Longley had said, a long letter, but the writer seemed to have studiously avoided mention of the cause that had driven him from England. He told of his adventures; how he had sledged up the country as far as Trondhjem, thence crossed the

peninsula, and pursued his route northwards through Sweden, and across Lapland into Finmark. He had hunted wolves upon the fjelds of Lapland, had lost himself in the wilds of Finmark, and found himself again upon the shores of the Arctic Ocean. From the north of Finmark he had journeyed down to the Loffoden Isles; it was there that he had written to his friends. He described at great length the perils and excitement of the fisherman's life that he was leading. Then he gave them some insight into his future plans. He should abide at Tromsö for a time, that he might have an opportunity of hearing from his friends, and then he should strike across the country towards the east, and wander whithersoever chance might take him. It was only at the very end of his letter that he mentioned the subject of his love. "I have tried to forget the past," he wrote; "I have tried to dismiss her from my thoughts. Hitherto I have not succeeded in my attempt. Heaven alone knows if I ever shall. I ~~must~~ think of her; and what thoughts I have—but I must not write about her. I cannot bear it. My eyes are blinded by tears—I must conclude

"my letter." Thus his letter had concluded. A postscript conveyed the assurance of his unalterable affection towards his two friends.

"Poor fellow!" said Haller, when he had finished reading the letter. "He does not seem to have got over that blow, in the least."

"We must pray for the best," answered Longley. "I am afraid that it will be a long time, though, before he gets over it."

"What do you intend to write to his mother?"

"I think that I cannot do better than send her this letter."

"Would Tommy like that, do you think?"

"I shall request her not to mention the fact of my having sent it to her, when she writes to him."

"Shall you explain to her how it is that his engagement is broken off?" asked Haller.

"No, I think not," answered his friend. "It is a delicate matter. His mother will see that it is broken off."

"But she will allude to it when she writes to him, and then he will think that we must have told her of it."

“ I shall advise her not to mention the subject to him. I may as well tell her of our plans—do you not think so ? ”

“ Yes ; there’s no harm in doing so, I think. Impress upon her that she must keep them dark, when she writes to him.”

“ I shall,” assented Longley. “ We must write a good, long letter to old Tommy ; a letter that will cheer him up.”

“ Of course we must,” said Haller. “ I have no end of stories to tell him. Let us sit down and write to him now.”

“ I cannot, Punch,” replied Longley ; “ I have to go to my ‘ coach ’ in a few minutes. It is nearly half-past eight.”

“ Hang your coach ! ” cried his friend. “ Can’t you cut him for once ? I had to go to Frumble at nine to-night—he drew me himself.” And Haller proceeded to narrate the particulars of his meeting with his tutor, and his score over the artful old dog, as it pleased him to term the reverend gentleman.

“ Take care, Punch,” said Longley, warningly : “ it will fare badly with you one of these days should Frumble have it in his power to

pay off all his indebtedness to you. Don't let him catch you out in to-night's work, that's all."

"No fear," laughed Haller. "I wish that you would come into College and have a hand in the fun. We could easily lower you from a window when it was over. Do come; we are going to screw Frumble up, too."

"No, I can't come, for I'm in training, and must be in bed long before twelve o'clock, at which hour, I suppose, your fun is to commence?"

"Yes, as soon as the lights are out, and the porter snoring. Well, old man, I know what a pig-headed mule you can be when you like, so I shan't press you to join us."

"Thank you," said Longley. "What was that row opposite St. Kenelm's this morning? Were the militia in mutiny?"

"Don't you know?" cried Haller. "Oh! it was the grandest joke in the world. The militia were drawn up in front of St. Kenelm's, just under Hardman's window. Salter and I were passing; suddenly a brilliant idea struck Salter. We rushed into College, collected all

the halfpence that we could, and then went to Hardman's room. We heated the halfpence on a shovel—made them almost red-hot—and then, just as the commanding officer gave the word attention, we threw out the shovelful to the men. You should have seen the scramble ; it was a perfect treat. Up galloped the commanding officer ; he was frantic with rage. He shook his sword at us, and swore at us like a bargee. We chaffed him in return, and one of us found another penny, and throwing it to him, begged him to take that, and not be too covetous. A mob collected, and jeered him unmercifully. At last the fellow went and complained to the master."

" How did Hardman get off?"

" Oh ! simply enough. He wasn't in his room when the affair happened, so, of course, was in no way responsible for what had been done. The fact was that we had found him in his room, and told him what we wished to do, and he very wisely went away, and enjoyed the fun from another man's window."

" A joke indeed, Punch ! I must be off now, though."

“Come along, then, old man. I shall return to College, to superintend our little arrangements for to-night’s diversion.”

CHAPTER XIV.

A PRETTY ROW.

THE clock of St. Kenelm's tower struck twelve.

The last man of those whom the College required to sleep within its walls had knocked in ; and, thanking his stars that the labours of the day were over, the rubicund-visaged porter proceeded to put out the lights ere retiring to rest. He was tired out, for he had been upon his legs all the evening ; yet did he console himself in his fatigue by thought of the unusual amount of gate-money that he must have netted that night.

The gates of St. Kenelm's were closed at nine o'clock, after which hour egress was not permitted to undergraduates residing in College. Out-College men and visitors might enter or leave St. Kenelm's until twelve o'clock, up to

which time there was right of ingress for all members of the College. The authorities, however, strove to induce those who were *in statu pupillari* to return betimes to College, or to their houses, by imposing a fine, increasing in proportion to the lateness of the hour, upon all who "knocked in" after nine o'clock. Thus, a man entering College between the hours of nine and ten ; was mulcted in the sum of one penny ; between ten and eleven, twopence ; and between eleven and twelve, threepence. It was a grave offence, and one which was seldom committed, to be abroad later than twelve o'clock without special leave.

It seemed to the worthy porter that the whole College had "knocked in" that night. Strangers, too, in unusual numbers, had come into St. Kenelm's. The porter had been kept upon the move all the evening, and right glad was he when, after letting the last stranger and out-College man out, and admitting the latest of those in-College men who had been abroad, he could lock up for the night. Having made all safe at the gate, he took his lamp, and proceeded upon his rounds.

Scarcely had he disappeared up the first staircase, when, from the staircase upon the other side of the gateway emerged two figures. For some seconds they stood still, listening and scrutinizing every corner of the quadrangle; and then, convinced that nobody was about, they proceeded noiselessly to the porter's lodge. The snow deadened the sound of their footsteps; they had taken other precautions, too, to guard against detection, by changing their boots for slippers. On tiptoe they entered the porter's lodge; they made their way to the nail upon which the chapel key generally hung. Plague and confusion! the key was not there. The two conspirators gazed at each other in blank dismay. One of them beckoned to the other; the other approached his ear to his companion's mouth.

"The key must be in his room," whispered the beckoner.

"But his wife—is she there?" asked his companion, under his breath.

"I don't know—the door is ajar—let us look."

Noiselessly the last speaker approached the

door of the porter's sitting-room ; attentively he listened for sound which should tell him if any person were in the room. A heavy breathing, as of somebody slumbering, fell upon his ear. Carefully he pushed the door a little further open. The massive door turned upon its well-oiled hinges without creaking. The conspirator peeped into the room ; then on tip-toe he retreated, and seizing his companion's arm, whispered,

“ She's fast asleep in an arm-chair.”

“ Can you get the key ?”

“ Yes, I think so ; I saw it hanging up.”

“ Go ahead then, old man.”

“ Hush !” whispered the first man, putting a finger to his lips.

“ Whish !” replied the second, assuming a tragic air, and placing two fingers upon the side of his nose.

At that moment a loud snore broke from the porter's wife. It was too much for the conspirators. One of them stuffed his handkerchief into his mouth ; the other bit his lip through to restrain his laughter. They made their way out of the porter's lodge, and then bolted off to their stair-

case. When safely there, they fell into each other's arms, shaking with suppressed laughter.

"Have you fellows got the key?" asked Haller, coming to them.

"No," answered Salter; "this old idiot Hill burst out laughing."

"Confound you, Hill!" said Haller, "have you spoilt it all?"

"No, it is all right," replied Hill; "I couldn't help myself; the porter's wife gave such an unearthly snore. The key is hanging up in the porter's room, and his wife is fast asleep there."

"I shall go and get it myself," declared Haller. "One of you fellows lend me your slippers. Here, put on my boots."

"Stop a minute, Punch, until the porter goes up another staircase."

Haller, accordingly, waited until the porter had ascended another flight of stairs. He then made his way quickly, and without noise, to the porter's lodge; and having satisfied himself that the partner of the porter's cares was asleep, he boldly entered the room in which she was sleeping, and having secured the key, effected his retreat without being discovered.

Together with his two friends, he then went upstairs to a large room, in which some twenty men were assembled. Great was the joy with which they welcomed Haller and his prize.

“Now, my friends,” said Haller, addressing them, “we must make no noise, and we must put out the lamp and sport the oak. I have arranged that every man’s lights shall be out, and his oak sported, as the porter goes round to turn off the gas, I went round College myself a short time ago, and sported every oak that I found open.”

“The deuce you did, Punch!” cried Hardman in alarm. “How on earth am I to get into my room. I haven’t a key.”

“You don’t think that I have locked you out, do you?” asked Haller. “No, I slipped the bolts first, so that the oaks could not fasten. They seem closed, that’s enough. Now, then, turn the lamp down, and be quiet.”

The lamp was lowered, and all sat still, awaiting the coming of the porter. In a few minutes they heard his weary step ascending the stairs. Having turned the gas out, he retraced his steps, thankful that his labours were over.

"The College is very quiet to-night, Martha," he observed, addressing his wife, as he was going to bed. "Everybody seems to be asleep. There isn't a single light in any of the rooms, and all the oaks are sported. Ah, it would have been different if the fellows had had their bump supper to-night. Wasn't there a row on at the last one! Bless me if I got a wink of sleep all night!"

Thus saying, the porter got into bed, and soon afterwards was sleeping the sleep of the tired.

The conspirators allowed half an hour to elapse after the retirement of the porter ere proceeding to their work; then they assembled in the quadrangle, and to each man was assigned a certain duty. Most of them were dispatched to collect snow; others were sent off to search for empty boxes, or any articles which might serve to fill up the ante-chapel: in the ante-chapel was stationed a strong party, whose duty it was to pack the snow and different articles brought to them. All laboured with a will. The snow was collected in coal-scuttles, baskets, wine-cases, and even in blankets, which certain patriotic men devoted to the good

cause. The work proceeded quickly and quietly.

"Doesn't it do your heart good to see these men work?" inquired Haller of Hardman. Both were engaged in treading down the snow that was brought to them by the collectors.

"You're right," replied Hardman. "Here, give a hand with this egg-case. It will fit into that corner beautifully. Yes, by Jove! I had no idea that our fellows had so much 'go' in them. The quietest men seem to be the hardest workers."

"If you want a real piece of devilry," said Haller, "you must go to a quiet man for it. Bravo, you fellows! you brought a good load that time—off you go for more!"

"Here is a splendid snowball!" cried Hardman, admiring an enormous mass of snow which some half-dozen men had rolled up to the chapel door. "Good men, give a hand, all of you. Hoist it up here. That will do. Good man, Lumkey!—mind the lamp, Punch. We must not do any mischief."

"How old Lumkey is working!" exclaimed Haller. "He is the last man I should have suspected of doing anything of the kind.

Doesn't he smile seraphically? His grin is broader than ever."

He whom Hardman had addressed as Lumkey was a scholar of the name of Hebbings, a quiet, hard-reading man, who went in for nothing but "grinding." He had distinguished himself by winning several prizes for learning, and was regarded by the whole college as the perfect model of a reading man. A peculiarity of this gentleman was a smile that was ever on his lips; this had gained for him the name of "*L'homme qui rit*,"—a name which, for brevity's sake, had been corrupted into Lumkeyree, and, for the same reason, still further shortened into Lumkey.

For two hours the labour went on, and then the work was well-nigh completed. The snow had been piled up to the very roof of the ante-chapel; the doors were then almost closed, and Hardman, who was stout and strong, standing between them, kept them sufficiently open to afford an egress to Haller, who was putting the finishing touches to the work. A large, heavy beam had been discovered in one of the cellars, and this had been so placed in the chapel that,

when the doors were shut, it should fall and secure them.

"Now, then, Punch, come out," cried Hardman, feeling that his strength was failing him. "In another second I shall be jammed as flat as a pancake. I cannot keep the door open longer."

"All right, old man, mind yourself," answered Haller, stepping upon his friend's shoulders, and leaping down to the ground. "Now, then, some of you, help me to hold the door, whilst Hardman gets out."

Several men lent their aid, and Hardman squeezed himself out. The door was then permitted to close, the heavy beam fell into its place, and the conspirators had the satisfaction of finding that all their efforts were unavailing to re-open the portals. They had triumphed.

"What are we to do with this snow?" asked Salter, who had just brought up a fresh supply.

"We don't want it; we had better leave it here," replied Haller.

"That won't do," said Lumkey. "The scouts will be in college by six o'clock. If they see this snow, they will suspect that something

is amiss, and they may try the chapel door, and finding that it is shut, take measures to open it. It is possible that they can effect an entrance in a couple of hours."

"Is it, by Jove!" exclaimed Hardman—"I doubt that."

"They may break the door down," continued Lumkey. "Anyhow, we ought to ensure their not getting the door open by eight o'clock, or we may have service then, after all. Now, if we take this snow away, they will suspect nothing, and, consequently, not try to get into chapel before it is time to ring the bell. I think that we may defy them to open the door in an hour."

"Lumkey's right!" cried Haller. "Ah! Lumkey, you're an artful dog, you are!" he added, giving the man whom he addressed a playful dig in the ribs.

Lumkey grinned more broadly than ever, but he very modestly disclaimed all right to be considered artful.

"You know that you're an artful dog," continued Haller, repeating his dig. "Who'd have thought it of you, Lumkey? Let us clear the

snow away. I have it; let us snow the master up."

This proposal was hailed with rapture, and accordingly the conspirators proceeded to pile up a heap of snow before the door of the master's house. It was easier work than the filling of the ante-chapel had been, and half an hour sufficed for the formation of a mound sufficiently big for their purpose. After that the toilers dispersed. Most of them sought their beds, but Haller and a chosen few had other work in hand. First they proceeded to the landing whereon dwelt the Rev. Mr. Frumble, whose door they fastened securely by means of a dozen long screws, the heads of which they cut off, after having driven the screws deeply into the door-post. Then they re-visited the porter's lodge, and filled the great lock of the gate with stones. They next attached a stone, by means of a long piece of string, to the key of the chapel door, and threw it up a tree. Then they examined the quadrangles carefully, to see that nothing that could lead to the identification of any of the conspirators had been left about. Then they partook of

some punishment after their actions, and finally brought her back happy in the consciousness of having performed a series of exploits unequalled in the annals of St. Zenon's College.

The next morning no change could invite the summons of those who had worked so hard. So soon summoned the masters to arms. It was long past eight o'clock when Haller dressed and made his way down to the Quadrangle to see the result of the past night's escapade.

It was a curious sight that met his eyes. Despairing of being able to clear away the mound of snow piled up before the door of the master's house, in time for chapel, the college servants had tunneled a hole through it, through which the master had crept, like an arctic fox from his burrow. One of the scouts had noticed the chapel-key swinging from one of the topmost boughs of a tall chestnut, and, for the last hour, scouts, gardeners, and porter had been vainly endeavouring to dislodge it. As Haller emerged from his staircase, a group was standing under the tree, watching the progress of an 'under-gardener, who, saw in hand, had mounted

the tree, for the purpose of sawing off the bough from which the key was swinging. Most of the Dons were there assembled, looking like so many crows upon a field of snow. Their faces wore an expression of holy horror at the crime that had been perpetrated. Gingerly they picked their way about over the snow. Sadly they compared notes upon the outrage. Dear me, dear me, did you ever? Alas! alas! no, I never did! Should you have thought it? Oh! no, never could I have credited it! We must find out those who are guilty of this wickedness! Oh! yes, that we must! We mustn't pass it over! Oh! no; by all that is terrible, by impositions, gatings, rustication, expulsion, we must punish the authors of this terrible insult!

And the master—how fared it with him? He, the master of the finest College in the finest University of the world, what thought he of the matter? How relished he being snowed up, and having to crawl out of his house in ignominious manner? How brooked he the outrage which seemed especially directed against him, as head of St. Kenelm's? His usually

placid features were red with anger; the polished baldness, which was so distinguishing an ornament to his intellectual head, shone more brightly than ever in his wrath. What did it all mean? Could nobody tell him? Why had he not been called before? Who had done this deed of impious daring? He insisted upon being informed at once.

Trembling, the scouts and porter made answer that the whole affair was past their comprehension. The locks of the College gates had been tampered with—more than an hour had elapsed ere the porter had been able to give admission that morning to those who sought it. They had done what they could. Had they not tunneled the master out? Had they not striven at imminent risk to their necks, to recover the key? What more could they have done?

Down came the bent at which the key was attached. Now then, it chanced. The porter led the way with the key, the scouts followed after; in the midst were the St. Benedictines, conversing upon the event of the morning. The church door was unlocked. Gracious

powers! had the impiety of the guilty dared to lay sacrilegious hand upon that sacred building? It was even so—the door could not be opened; firm as a rock, it resisted every attempt to unclose it. Redder shone the master's face, deeper grew the expression of holy horror upon the face of the Dons. Try the other door—the little door leading from the ante-chapel into the Fellows' garden. Closed too! Oh! fury and madness! Smash the doors in! By all the curses of OEdipus, the College must exact a terrible revenge for this!

And Frumble—where was he? For forty years he had not missed a chapel. What had befallen him? His scout had gone to call him that morning, and had found his door bolted upon the inside, so, thinking that the reverend gentleman might not wish to be called early, he had retired again, and devoted himself to the work of excavation going on before the master's house. Go and fetch Frumble! Tell him of this horrible affair! Tell him to come quickly!

Haller winked at his friend Hardman, and the two followed the scout to Frumble's landing. Soon they were conscious that their

worthy tutor was awake. From the hole in the door, through which his letters were pushed, issued sundry feeble cries for help ; and from the bangs against the door it became evident that the reverend gentleman was plying his poker, instead of a knocker, upon the inside.

“ What is the matter, my dear sir ? ” asked Haller, blandly.

“ Tut-tut-tut-tay, I’m tut-tut-tut-tum fastened in,” came a voice through the letter-hole.

“ Dear me, how sad,” said Hardman.

“ Tut-tut-tay let me out ! ” cried Frumble.

“ Tut-tut-tay we can’t,” answered Haller.

“ Your door is locked inside, sir,” said the scout.

“ Tut-tut-tay it is not,” replied Frumble.

“ Let me look, gentlemen,” said the scout, to Haller and Hardman. “ Why, he is screwed in—yes, and the heads of the screws are cut off. I don’t know how we shall open the door.” And the scout looked knowingly at the two friends.

“ What tut-tut-tay do you say ? ” asked Frumble, anxiously.

“ I regret to say, my dear sir, that there is no

prospect of your getting out for the next six or eight hours," said Haller.

A cry of despair broke from Frumble's lips.

"Are you hungry, my dear sir?" asked Haller. "If you are, we can poke something to eat through the keyhole."

"You must keep your strength up," continued Hardman. "You may be unable to get out to-day, you know. If you like I will get some beer, and you can suck it through the key-hole."

"Or some gin. You're rather partial to gin, are you not, my dear sir?" asked Haller, tenderly.

"Tut-tut-tay William," stuttered the tutor, "bring the tut-tut-tay carpenter, and break the tut-tut-tum door open."

"No good, my dear sir," said Hardman. "You had better go to bed again. Cheer up, and bear your misfortune like a Christian. Show us how resigned you can be."

"William," gasped Mr. Frumble; "tut-tut-tay who is that who tut-tut-tum spoke to me?"

Haller motioned to William to go away, and the scout departed in quest of the carpenter.

"Now, my worthy sir," said Haller, "let me give you a word of advice. You are the sole cause of certain things that were done last night. The College has registered a forcible protest against you. Be advised by me, and behave better for the future. Do not be so pig-headed. Permit others to enjoy themselves in their own quiet way. Do not be such a bigot—ah! he has gone."

The Rev. Mr. Frumble had retreated into his room, slamming the inner door after him.

Haller and Hardman descended to the Quad, where they met William returning with the carpenter. They bribed the scout not to reveal the fact of their having been on Frumble's landing to the enraged tutor, and then made their way to the chapel, to watch the operations against the door.

It took two hours to effect an entrance into the ante-chapel. Then, when the full extent of the mischief was revealed, the eyes of the Dons were open to the painful fact that such a work could not have been the doing of a few men. It was evidently the work of the whole College, and was, therefore, of deep significance.

Whilst the ante-chapel was being cleared out, Mr. Bills made his appearance upon the scene. The conspirators drew near to him, anxious to hear what he thought of the matter.

"Ah, yes, silly boys, silly boys ! I daresay that they will be sorry for what they have done." Thus saying, the learned Professor retraced his steps to his own rooms.

Mr. Frumble, too, appeared upon the scene. He had vainly endeavoured to ascertain from his scout who the men were who had spoken to him. The scout professed perfect ignorance upon the subject. "There might have been some gentleman there, sir," he said, "but I was too much occupied in trying to open the door to notice who they were." This answer by no means appeased the tutor's wrath. He would have given much to ascertain the names of those who had chaffed him. Haller and Hardman had spoken in disguised tones, so that he had not recognised their voices. Never before had the Reverend Mr. Frumble been so angry, but, wisely, he kept the main cause of his anger to himself.

Haller happened to approach the tutor, who

was standing apart from the other Dons, watching the clearance of the chapel. Frumble saw him; an innate consciousness told him that it was Haller to whom the College was indebted for what had been done. He turned sharply upon the young man.

"Tut-tut-tay, Mr. Haller," he cried, "do you know anything about this tut-tut-tum disgraceful affair?"

"I am sorry to say that I know of several disgraceful affairs in connection with the College," replied Haller, gravely. "May I ask which of them you mean?"

"Tut-tut-tay, which do I mean, sir? Tut-tut-tum, sir, what do *you* mean?"

"Well, sir, in the first place, there is the College dinner. Is that not disgracefully bad?"
Then there's—

"Tut-tut-tay, Mr. Haller, this outrage, I mean—this tut-tut-tum disgraceful outrage!"

"Oh, yes," replied Haller. "It is very sad, indeed. No chapel this morning. That was most melancholy, especially for me, who, mindful of your advice, got up to go to it."

Mr. Frumble looked hard at his pupil. Then

a thought struck him. In milder tone he asked,

"Tay, Mr. Haller. Then it was your wish to go to chapel this tut-tum morning? Did you really wish tut-tut to go?"

"Why else should I have got up to go to it?" asked Haller.

Mr. Frumble smiled. "Tut-tay, Mr. Haller, you shall not be tut-tum disappointed. Come with me, tut-tut-tay, we shall have service in my room."

Haller was booked, and could not get out of it. Mr. Frumble collected a few other men and Dons, and had prayers in his own room. The service took nearly an hour that morning, instead of a customary half-hour.

The greatest efforts were made by the College authorities to discover the authors of the outrage. The scouts were all examined, and all declared that it was impossible that their several masters could have been implicated in the affair. According to them, there was not the slightest clue to the guilty parties. The Dons were nonplussed. They were on the horns of a dilemma. Either they must send the whole College down, or pass the matter over. As the

former would have injured the reputation of the College, and the chances of its men in the Schools, they were constrained to adopt the latter alternative.

There was a small triumph in reserve for the Dons. Fearing a repetition of the outrage, they made a bargain with a contractor to clear away all snow from the Quads by nightfall. Every available labourer in the city was procured, and the contract was duly executed, at a cost of twenty or thirty pounds. The undergraduates laughed at the fears of the authorities. They did not laugh, however, when they read a certain item in their next battels, as their weekly bills were called.

“To clearing away snow, and repairing damages, 30s.”

The wily Dons had made over a hundred pounds by the transaction.

Some good came of the escapade. It was regarded as being, in some measure, a protest against compulsory Chapel. A new College regulation was accordingly made, whereby men had the option of going to chapel, or attending roll-call, at eight o’clock in the morning.

This gladdened the hearts of those who were prone to laziness, for they thought that, between the two systems, they could escape both. Their gladness was soon checked. Hitherto, men had been able to cut chapel pretty freely; henceforth, attendance at chapel or roll-call was rigidly enforced, under pain of losing a term. Still those who loved sleep rejoiced. They could get out of bed a few minutes before eight o'clock, jump into a pair of trousers, and a peajacket, tie a comforter round their neck, and hurry off to the porter, who put their names down on his list. For a time matters went well with the lovers of sleep, but, eventually, they were triumphed over. One morning, Haller, who had got out of bed at two minutes to eight, and had arrived in the porter's lodge as the clock was striking the hour, was surprised to see the Rev. Mr. Frumble standing by the porter.

"Tut-tut-tay, Mr. Haller," said Frumble, smiling. "I must request you tut-to return tut-to your rooms and dress. In future I tut-tut-tum hope that I shall not have tut-to remind

you of such a tut-tut-tum omission. Do not prick Mr. tut-tut-tay Haller's name down this morning, porter."

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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